

# EGYPT 2022 HUMAN RIGHTS REPORT

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

According to its constitution, Egypt is a republic governed by an elected president and bicameral legislature, with the upper house reconstituted in 2020 as the Senate after a six-year absence. Officially the president is the head of state while the prime minister is appointed by the president as the head of government and appoints the cabinet. Presidential elections in 2018 saw challengers to incumbent President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi withdraw ahead of the election, citing personal decisions, political pressure, legal troubles, and unfair competition, and in some cases, they were arrested for alleged abuses of candidacy rules. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process. A progovernment coalition won an overwhelming majority of seats in multistage, multiround elections for parliament's reconstituted Senate and House of Representatives. Domestic and international observers said government authorities professionally administered parliamentary elections in accordance with the country's laws and that their results were credible. Observers noted restrictions on freedom of peaceful assembly, political association, and expression significantly inhibited the political climate surrounding the elections.

The Interior Ministry supervises law enforcement and internal security, including the Public Security Sector Police, the Central Security Force, the National Security Agency, and the Passports, Immigration, and Nationality Administration. The Public Security Sector Police are responsible for law enforcement nationwide. The Central Security Force protects infrastructure and is responsible for crowd control. The National Security Agency, which succeeded the State Security Investigation Service in 2011, is responsible for internal security threats and counterterrorism, along with other security services. The Passports, Immigration, and Nationality Administration is responsible for issuing travel documents, processing immigration requests, and managing citizenship issues. The armed forces report to the minister of defense but may also assist police in protecting vital infrastructure during a state

of emergency. The armed forces operate in North Sinai as part of a broader national counterterrorism operation with general detention authority. The Border Guard Forces, under the Ministry of Defense, are responsible for border control. Civilian authorities maintained effective control over the security forces. There were reports that members of the security forces committed numerous abuses.

In 2021 President Sisi ended a state of emergency but ratified legislation providing similar powers, including allowing the president to take “appropriate measures” not to exceed six months to maintain public order and security (e.g., curfews or forced evacuations) in the event of a natural disaster or terrorism event, and authorizing the military to assist local authorities in protecting critical infrastructure. In April President Sisi reactivated the Presidential Pardon Commission, leading to the release of 850-1,000 political prisoners through the end of the year, according to estimates by local human rights organizations and members of the Presidential Pardon Commission.

Significant human rights issues included credible reports of: unlawful or arbitrary killings, including extrajudicial killings by the government or its agents, and by terrorist groups; enforced disappearance by state security; torture and cases of cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment by the government; harsh and life-threatening prison conditions; arbitrary arrest and detention; political prisoners or detainees; transnational repression against individuals in another country; arbitrary or unlawful interference with privacy; serious abuses in a conflict, including reportedly enforced disappearances, abductions, physical abuses, and unlawful or widespread civilian deaths or harm; serious restrictions on free expression and media, including arrests or prosecutions of journalists, censorship, and the enforcement of or threat to enforce criminal libel laws to limit expression; serious restrictions on internet freedom; substantial interference with the freedom of peaceful assembly and freedom of association, including overly restrictive laws on the organization, funding, or operation of nongovernmental and civil society organizations; restrictions on freedom of movement; serious and unreasonable restrictions on political participation; serious government restrictions on domestic and international human rights organizations; gender-based violence and a lack of investigation and accountability for such crimes; crimes involving violence or threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer,

or intersex persons; and significant restrictions on workers' freedom of association.

The government failed to consistently punish or prosecute officials who committed abuses, whether in the security services or elsewhere in government, including for corruption. In most cases, the government did not comprehensively investigate allegations of human rights abuses, including most incidents of violence by security forces, contributing to an environment of impunity.

Attacks by terrorist organizations and other armed groups resulted in unlawful killings, including in North Sinai. Terrorist groups conducted deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets. Authorities investigated terrorist attacks and prosecuted alleged perpetrators. Terrorists and other armed groups also abducted civilians in North Sinai. There were incidents of societal sectarian violence against Coptic Christians.

## **Section 1. Respect for the Integrity of the Person**

### **a. Arbitrary Deprivation of Life and Other Unlawful or Politically Motivated Killings**

There were numerous reports the government or its agents committed arbitrary or unlawful killings that occurred while making arrests or holding persons in custody. Local and international rights groups reported instances of persons tortured to death and other allegations of killings in prisons and detention centers by security forces. The Public Prosecutor's Office charged, prosecuted, and convicted perpetrators in a small number of cases, but lack of accountability remained a serious problem.

There were reports of civilians killed during military operations in North Sinai. There were also reports of civilians killed by ISIS-Sinai Province.

Human rights groups and family members identified multiple detainees who died while in custody because of abuse or neglect. A report by a local monitoring organization stated 52 prisoners and detainees died as a result of abuse or medical neglect during the year. In August human rights groups reported separate incidents of prisoners dying in custody due to abuse and lack of medical attention, including Mustafa Nafe Ramadan, a 19-year-old car mechanic who reportedly died as the

result of injuries to his head and neck sustained while in custody. In each incident, official statements claimed the detainee died of natural causes or from altercations with fellow inmates, and the investigations were closed without accountability or finding of wrongdoing.

In March economist and researcher Ayman Hadhoud died in custody after being arrested and subsequently transferred to a psychiatric hospital. Hadhoud was never formally charged, despite being detained for more than a month, and authorities provided conflicting explanations for his initial arrest. Despite multiple human rights groups assessing he died as a result of torture based on photographs of his body, the public prosecutor stated in April that Hadhoud died from a chronic cardiac condition and argued that his body did not bear the marks of torture. In June the Cairo Criminal Court rejected Hadhoud's family's appeal to reinvestigate the case.

In July the Court of Cassation in Rome upheld a ruling that the trial in absentia of four Egyptian security officers accused of kidnapping and killing Italian doctoral student Giulio Regeni in 2016 could not proceed. Regeni had been researching labor unions in the country at the time of his death. The Associated Press reported the ruling sided with defense arguments that the defendants were never formally notified of the proceedings, as required under Italian law, because their official addresses were not provided. Egyptian prosecutors previously dismissed similar charges and discontinued investigations into the incident.

There were several official and media reports of alleged terrorists and criminals killed during raids by security forces. In May the armed forces reported 10 militants were killed and weapons seized during a raid on a suspected storage facility.

In August rights groups reported progovernment tribal militias carried out unlawful killings of three individuals in the Sinai Peninsula. The groups identified the sources from videos and photographs showing the killings or their aftermath, provided analysis of the content, and concluded that the militias were responsible for the incidents. NGO Human Rights Watch (HRW) subsequently issued a report verifying the authenticity of videos and photographs of the incidents. The group called on authorities to conduct a transparent and impartial investigation into the

alleged abuses and punish those responsible as appropriate. As of year's end, there was no information suggesting authorities had conducted or begun any investigation.

Deadly attacks on government, civilian, and security targets by terrorist groups, primarily ISIS-Sinai Province (formerly known as Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis), in North and South Sinai continued throughout the year. Other terrorist groups, including Harakat al-Suwad Misr, reportedly continued to operate. There were no official, published data on the number of civilian victims of terrorist violence during the year. In April President Sisi stated that since 2013 the military and security forces had lost 3,277 personnel fighting terrorism in North Sinai, with another 12,277 wounded.

In February ISIS-Sinai Province posted images of what it claimed was the execution of a Sinai resident accused of aiding in the capture of ISIS militants. In March the UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights issued a statement on executions after death sentences were carried out in two cases, known locally as the Hilwan Microbus and Soldiers of Egypt cases, where the defendants were reportedly subjected to enforced disappearances and torture to obtain confessions. The high commissioner called on authorities to take all steps to ensure due process and fair trials. On May 24, NGO Amnesty International stated the country's courts at times imposed death sentences after proceedings that did not meet international fair standards.

In April local and international human rights organizations called on President Sisi to halt the executions from mass death sentences issued against 16 persons in July 2021 in Case 303/2018, known in the media as "the 2015 bombing of the police bus in Beheira." The trial took place in a special court authorized during the country's 2017-21 state of emergency, which did not permit any appeal. The organizations claimed the defendants did not have a fair trial before the emergency court and demanded a retrial in ordinary courts. In June Amnesty International called to repeal death sentences following a verdict in the "Helwan Brigades" case, which the organization characterized as a "torture-tainted grossly unfair mass trial" for more than 200 defendants. There were no reports the sentences were carried out by year's end.

## **b. Disappearance**

International and local human rights groups reported continuing large numbers of enforced disappearances, alleging authorities utilized this tactic to intimidate critics.

Authorities detained individuals without producing arrest or search warrants. According to local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), authorities detained many of these individuals in unspecified National Security Agency offices and police stations, but they were not included in official registers of detainees. Authorities held detainees incommunicado and denied their requests to contact family members and lawyers for periods ranging from a few days to several years.

In August the Campaign to Stop Enforced Disappearances reported that 2,300 of the 3,000 cases submitted to the Presidential Pardon Commission (PPC) for pardon or release involved enforced disappearances. In December a second local NGO published a report stating there were 3,155 cases involving enforced disappearance in 2022 and 16,955 cumulatively in the previous nine years.

In August human rights defenders repeated their call for authorities to reveal the location of former parliamentarian Mustafa al-Naggar four years after his disappearance in 2018, as ordered by the Administrative Court in 2020. There were no updates regarding al-Naggar's whereabouts at year's end.

## **c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, and Other Related Abuses**

The constitution states that no torture, intimidation, coercion, or physical or moral harm shall be inflicted upon a person whose movements are restricted or whom authorities have detained or arrested. The penal code forbids torture to induce a confession from a detained or arrested suspect but does not account for mental or psychological abuse against persons whom authorities have not formally accused, or for abuse occurring for reasons other than securing a confession. While the law authorizes prison officials to use force against prisoners who resist orders, the penal code forbids all public officials or civil servants from "employing cruelty" or "causing bodily harm" under any circumstances. Nonetheless, there were

numerous reports that government officials employed torture or cruel, inhuman, and degrading treatment or punishment.

Local rights organizations reported abusive practices were systemic, including instances resulting in death (see section 1.a.). According to domestic and international human rights organizations, police and prison guards regularly abused detainees, including minors, through beatings, electric shocks, psychological abuse, and sexual assault, at times, including as part of interrogation.

In January the British daily newspaper the *Guardian* released videos that allegedly showed officials at the al-Salam police station in Cairo torturing detainees. One video appeared to show detainees hung in stress positions, suspended from a grate by their arms with hands fastened behind their backs, according to the report. In the second video, detainees showed their wounds, described how they were inflicted, and named some of the alleged perpetrators. Multiple international rights groups noted the allegations in the videos were consistent with previous years' reporting. In February the Public Prosecutor's Office claimed that the inmates inflicted the injuries upon themselves and circulated the videos "at the instigation of others inside and outside the country in order to destabilize it," and the Supreme State Security Prosecution (SSSP) instead investigated the detainees. In May, 23 detainees faced charges, including "harming the public interest," "disturbing public security," and "spreading false news," for sharing the videos of alleged torture incidents, according to local rights groups. In November nine defendants received life sentences, including a U.S.-based YouTuber tried in absentia, 13 defendants received 15-year sentences, and a minor received a five-year term.

In June a Cairo Court of Appeals rejected a lawsuit against the prosecutor general filed by the family of imprisoned activist Alaa Abdel Fattah for authorities' failure to investigate alleged violations of physical abuse, adverse prison conditions, and lack of due process. Abdel Fattah, a long-time activist, was convicted of "spreading false news" in December 2021 and sentenced to five years in prison in an emergency court trial where, according to Abdel Fattah's lawyer, the judge did not allow the defense team to see the text of the ruling and only informed them of the court decision orally. In April family members announced on social media that Abdel Fattah had obtained United Kingdom citizenship and that they had requested consular access for UK officials, as well as access to him for his UK lawyers. In

April Abdel Fattah reportedly began a hunger strike, consuming approximately 100 calories per day to protest his unjust detention, prison conditions, and lack of consular access, according to human rights reports and statements by his family. His hunger strike escalated to a no-water, no-calories strike in November, according to family members, which was reportedly ended via medical intervention by prison authorities after Abdel Fattah reportedly collapsed on November 11. As of year's end, Abdel Fattah remained in detention, and neither UK consular officials nor his UK attorneys had been permitted by authorities to meet him.

On July 25, a local rights group and legal clinic submitted a complaint to the prosecutor general against the administrators of Tora Prison and a member of the prison staff for an alleged assault of activist Ahmed Douma, who was serving a 15-year prison sentence for participating in a 2011 protest. According to the complaint, on July 19, the deputy prison warden and the officer bound Douma's hands and feet, then beat him with their shoes, causing injuries and bruises. The prison's administrators also reportedly tried to prevent Douma from officially reporting the assault. At year's end, Douma remained in prison.

The quasi-governmental National Council for Human Rights (NCHR) stated it intended to visit 300 police detention facilities, which are separate from prisons, to examine conditions following reports in August by human rights groups of inmates dying in custody (see section 1.a.) but had yet to do so by year's end.

Multiple rights groups indicated authorities subjected prisoners accused of crimes related to political or security matters to physical and verbal abuse and prolonged or indefinite solitary confinement. Human rights defenders and former detainees detailed so-called welcome parades/parties as a common experience for political prisoners in prisons, in which guards blindfolded inmates upon arrival and subjected them to a variety of abuses, including stripping their clothing; forcing detainees to run under threat of violence including dog attacks; physical abuse including slapping; verbal insults; and denial of bathing.

Human rights organizations stated the Public Prosecutor's Office continued to order forced anal and vaginal "exams" of detainees, primarily in "debauchery" cases against transgender women and men who have sex with men. Civil society



organizations further alleged that the authority to undertake these abusive practices stemmed from internal guidelines rather than law, and that police would continue to carry them out absent formal prohibition from leadership. Authorities regularly used the “results” of forced anal exams as evidence against the defendants, despite independent international medical experts having emphasized that there was no medical or evidentiary basis for such conclusions (see section 6).

According to human rights activists, security force impunity was a significant problem. The Prosecutor General’s Office (for Interior Ministry actions) and the Military Prosecution (for military actions) are responsible for pursuing prosecutions and investigating whether security force actions were justifiable.

Rights groups stated the mechanisms existed for investigating complaints of security force abuses, both through the prosecutor’s office and the NCHR (see section 1.a.). Despite the existence of these mechanisms, multiple groups reported investigations of deaths in custody often concluded that the death occurred from natural causes or did not include a forensic examination. In a small number of cases (see section 1.a.), however, reported abuse led to investigations and charges against security officials.

In June the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced the former chief and the senior corporal of the investigations department in Helwan Police Station to seven years in prison for the death in custody of Walid Abdel Azim in 2019. According to the forensic report, the defendants beat Azim while his hands were cuffed behind his feet, leading to his death. In a separate case, the Court of Cassation upheld a three-and-a-half-year prison sentence against a former assistant detective in the Mokattam Police Station for the 2018 death of Mohamed Abdel Hakim, known as “Afroto” in local media. The forensic report showed a fractured rib caused severe internal bleeding while in custody, leading to his death.

After a 2019 verdict found police officer Sherif Safi El-Din Abdel Moneim guilty of cruelty and causing permanent disability, for abusing prisoner Mounir Yousry on May 15 at Central Prison in 2017 and causing Yousry to lose his left eye, the Court of Cassation rejected Abdel Moneim’s appeal in March and let stand his six-month prison sentence with hard labor.

In other cases, convictions of abusive security forces were nullified by presidential pardons. In April media reported on leaked documents indicating that on National Police Day in January, President Sisi issued pardons for 13 police officers previously convicted of causing deaths in custody by torture in three different cases. He reportedly pardoned five of nine officers convicted and sentenced to three years in 2020 for the death of Magdy Makeen in 2016; five officers, including the chief of detectives who had been sentenced to eight years, in the 2018 death of Ahmed Ajmai; and three officers sentenced in connection with the 2016 death of Mohammed Saleh Ahmed. Following the leaks, the Geneva-based Committee for Justice criticized the pardons as protecting the army and police from accountability even in the few instances when civil society pressure and outrage had led to prosecutions for torture and deaths in prison.

### **Prison and Detention Center Conditions**

Prison conditions were harsh and life threatening due to widespread overcrowding and lack of adequate access to medical care, proper sanitation and ventilation, food, and potable water.

**Abusive Physical Conditions:** According to domestic and international NGOs, prison cells were overcrowded. Human rights groups continued to estimate there were 120,000 prisoners in detention facilities, of whom approximately 80,000 were convicted prisoners and 40,000 pretrial detainees. The groups noted these were estimates because the government did not regularly publish official statistics. Diaa Rashwan, head of the State Information Services, also previously stated to local media that there were 120,000 prisoners or 36 per 100,000 persons.

There were multiple reports from human rights organizations and family members that detainees undertook hunger strikes to demand improved conditions, including better sanitary conditions, access to medical treatment, family visitations, mandated exercise periods, adequate lighting, written materials, personal items, and food provided by families. Inmates often relied upon outside visitors for food and other supplies or were forced to purchase those items from the prison canteen at significantly inflated prices, according to local NGOs.

Authorities did not always separate juveniles from adults and sometimes held

pretrial detainees with convicted prisoners, according to human rights organizations and media reports. Reports that guards abused prisoners, including juveniles in adult facilities, were common. Prison conditions for women were reported to be marginally better than those for men.

Local and international human rights groups assessed that harsh conditions and prison overcrowding contributed to the number of deaths in prisons and detention centers. These groups assessed that the practices of continuing pretrial detention beyond the two-year legal limit further contributed to prison overcrowding. Human rights groups and the families of some deceased prisoners claimed that prison authorities denied prisoners access to potentially life-saving medical care and in some cases denied requests to transfer the prisoners to the hospital, leading to deaths in prison.

Former presidential candidate and Strong Egypt Party leader Abdel Moneim Aboul Fotouh, imprisoned on charges of “spreading false news” and “incitement against state institutions,” was reportedly assaulted by guards in Tora Prison in March. According to a statement by Aboul Fotouh’s lawyer, he filed an official report to the public prosecutor regarding his client’s health in July, and Aboul Fotouh received treatment within the prison’s medical center at that time. The family requested a transfer of Aboul Fotouh to an external medical facility for an examination, but the request was not granted. Family members said Fotouh had a fourth heart attack in August and accused the prisons of medical neglect.

In March political activist Ahmed Douma started a hunger strike to protest poor conditions and physical abuse in Tora Prison and filed suit against the prison administration for preventing him from continuing distance education. In July his family said a prison guard assaulted Douma during a dispute over possible COVID-19 infections and sanitary practices within the facility. The NCHR (see section 1.a.) reportedly intervened with prison authorities in August to separate the alleged perpetrator from Douma, pending investigation. In 2019 Douma was sentenced to a 15-year prison term for violating a ban on unauthorized protests after trials that rights organizations characterized as unfair and lacking impartiality.

In July the Ministry of Interior denied reports the COVID-19 virus had spread within detention facilities, following a claim by the family of then imprisoned

journalist Hisham Fouad that he contracted the virus at Tora Prison. Fouad received a presidential pardon later in July and was released from detention.

**Administration:** Prisoners could request investigation of alleged inhuman conditions, but NGO observers claimed prisoners were reluctant to do so due to fear of retribution from prison officials. The government did not sufficiently investigate most allegations when complaints were submitted, according to public statements by prisoners' and detainees' lawyers and rights organizations. As required by law, the public prosecutor inspected prisons and detention centers, and the NCHR completed multiple prison visits during the year.

The criminal procedure code and the law regulating prisons ostensibly provide for reasonable access to prisoners, including family visitations, but according to NGO observers and relatives, the government regularly prevented visitors' access to detainees and arbitrarily prevented prisoners from receiving personal items and food.

**Independent Monitoring:** The government organized limited tours of the new Wadi al-Natroun and Badr facilities for foreign correspondents and journalists, and also delegations from various embassies and international organizations, to observe prison facilities.

**Improvements:** The government began closing aging prisons and continued transferring inmates to newer facilities such as Badr and Wadi al-Natroun prisons after opening them in 2021.

In August authorities announced all prisoners and detainees had been moved from Maximum Security Prison 992, known as "Scorpion," to the modern Badr facility, east of Cairo, or the Scorpion 2 cell block within Tora.

#### **d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention**

The constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention and provides for the right of any person to challenge the lawfulness of his or her arrest or detention in court but there were widespread and frequent reported incidents of arbitrary arrests and detentions, according to local and international rights groups.

## **Arrest Procedures and Treatment of Detainees**

There were numerous reports of arrests without a warrant, despite the law requiring that police act based on a judicial warrant issued either under the penal code or the code of military justice except where persons were apprehended in the process of committing a crime.

Ordinary criminal courts and misdemeanor courts hear cases brought by the prosecutor general. Arrests for criminal offenses under the penal code occurred with warrants issued by a public prosecutor or judge. Human rights lawyers and advocates reported that judges and prosecutors rarely used available alternatives for releasing defendants pending trial, such as requiring periodic appearance at a local police station, travel bans, or home detention, and even in cases where bail was ordered, some defendants claimed judges imposed unreasonably high bail.

The law provides criminal defendants the right to counsel promptly after arrest and obliges the court to provide a lawyer to indigent defendants, but defendants often faced administrative problems, and in some cases political or legal obstacles, to utilizing these rights and often could not secure regular access to lawyers or family visits.

A prosecutor may order four days of preventive detention for individuals suspected of committing misdemeanors or felonies. In regular criminal cases, the period of preventive detention is subject to renewal in increments of 15 days by the investigative judge up to a total of 45 days, for both misdemeanors and felonies. Before the 45th day, the prosecutor must submit the case to a misdemeanor appellate court panel of three judges, who may release the accused person or renew the detention in further increments of 45 days. In cases under the jurisdiction of the State Security Prosecution, prosecutors may renew preventive detention in increments of 15 days up to a total of 150 days, after which the prosecutor must refer the case to a criminal court panel of three judges to renew the detention in increments of 45 days. Multiple reports from lawyers and rights groups stated “perfunctory” detention renewal hearings regularly were held for hundreds of defendants in a single court session and did not provide detainees the meaningful ability to defend themselves.

Defendants regularly were detained from the initial investigation through all stages of criminal judicial proceedings. The combined periods of prosecutor- and court-ordered detentions prior to trial may not exceed six months in cases of misdemeanors, 18 months in cases of felonies, and two years in cases involving the death penalty or life imprisonment. After pretrial detention reaches its legal limit without a conviction, by law authorities must release the accused person immediately. Rights groups claimed accused persons regularly were held beyond the pretrial detention limit, and authorities often brought additional or similar charges after the detention limit was reached, thereby “recycling” or “rotating” the accused person into indefinite pretrial detention by restarting the two-year time limit for pretrial detention. In May a local monitoring group released a report claiming that between 2018 and 2021, more than 1,700 detainees had been held in pretrial detention longer than the two-year limit and had been recycled into new cases without being released.

According to human rights groups, authorities sometimes added charges involving the death penalty or life imprisonment, such as joining a banned group seeking to undermine state institutions, to cases related to freedom of expression or to other politically motivated cases. As a result, authorities held individuals charged with nonviolent crimes by prolonging the duration of their trial or rearresting them into new cases to avoid the two-year pretrial detention limit. According to a monitoring group, in the first half of the year, terrorism circuit courts handling these types of charges released pretrial detainees in only 2.7 percent of 13,000 adjudications before the courts.

**Arbitrary Arrest:** The constitution prohibits arrest, search, or detention without a judicial warrant, except for those caught in the act of a crime. These rights are suspended during a state of emergency, the most recent of which expired in October 2021. There were frequent reports of arbitrary arrest and detention. Local activists and rights groups stated that hundreds of arrests did not comply with due-process laws. For example, authorities did not charge the detainees with crimes or refer them to prosecutors and denied access to their lawyers and families (see section 1.b.).

In March security personnel detained human rights lawyer Youssef Mansour without presenting an arrest warrant, according to rights groups. Mansour was

held incommunicado for two days before facing charges of “spreading false news,” joining a terrorist group, and incitement to commit a terrorist crime, reportedly for social media posts criticizing prison conditions and denial of family visits for one of his clients. As of year’s end, the government had not responded to a May inquiry on Mansour’s arrest and arbitrary detention from a group of UN special rapporteurs. Multiple rights groups asserted Mansour’s arrest was in response to his legitimate exercise of professional duties as a lawyer. Mansour remained in detention at year’s end.

In May authorities arrested photojournalist Mohamad Fawzy after he published social media posts critical of government initiatives and the lack of pardons for political prisoners. According to Fawzy’s lawyers, the SSSP questioned Fawzy on allegations of joining a terrorist group and “spreading false news.” Local rights groups described the detention as an arbitrary arrest for expressing his opinion and stated he disappeared for two weeks after being arrested, during which time local police denied any arrest warrant was issued for Fawzy. He remained in detention at year’s end.

**Pretrial Detention:** The government did not provide figures on the total number of pretrial detainees, and nongovernmental estimates of the number of pretrial and preventive detainees varied widely. Rights groups alleged that authorities excessively used pretrial detention and preventive detention against individuals accused of nonviolent crimes. The NCHR stated it coordinated efforts to address complaints of pretrial detainees. The Presidential Pardon Committee was also involved in the release of 850 to 1,000 individuals from pretrial detention. Large backlogs in the criminal courts contributed to protracted periods of pretrial detention, as did the authorities “recycling” of cases as noted above.

On August 1, the *al-Jazeera* news network issued a statement condemning the renewal of pretrial detention for its journalist Rabie el-Sheikh for 45 days “without trial or charges.” Reporters Without Borders (RSF) previously called for el-Sheikh’s release following his August 2021 arrest at Cairo International Airport. Three other detained *al-Jazeera* journalists (Hisham Abdel Aziz, Bahauddin Ibrahim, and Ahmed al-Najdi) had been in pretrial detention since 2019 and 2020, years longer than the legal limit, “simply for doing their work,” declared the network. All were charged with “spreading false news” or membership in a

terrorist group. On September 14, investigating authorities issued a decision to release Ahmed al-Najdi, and he was freed several days later.

On May 30, political activist Sameh Saudi was released following a decision by the SSSP. According to a local rights group, Saudi remained in pretrial detention from 2018 to 2022 after being “recycled” into three different cases for allegedly “joining a terrorist group.”

Since his 2018 arrest, activist and cofounder of the April 6 Youth Movement Mohamed Adel remained in pretrial detention in three separate cases, related to allegations of violating the protest law, joining a banned group, and “spreading false news.”

In May a local human rights group called for the immediate release of Ahmed Sabry Ali Nassef following prolonged pretrial detention, multiple instances of “recycling” the defendant, and rearrest following an acquittal on similar charges. According to the rights group’s statement, Nassef was initially arrested and detained in 2017 on charges of joining a terrorist organization. Following two years of pretrial detention, the SSSP ordered Nassef’s release in 2019, but the decision was not implemented, according to the group. The prosecution began investigating Nassef on the same charges later that year but again ordered his release in September 2021. Nassef faced the same charges for a third time in October 2021, but a Cairo court acquitted him in April. According to the rights group representing him, Nassef was never released. Instead, in May he was charged again with joining a terrorist group, in violation of double jeopardy laws that prohibit charging a defendant repeatedly for the same incident.

Engineer Hosam Khalaf remained in pretrial detention at year’s end despite having been detained far longer than the two-year limit for pretrial detention. Authorities had arrested him and his spouse Ola Qaradawi in 2017 on charges of communicating with and facilitating support for a terrorist group. Qaradawi was released in December 2021.

## **e. Denial of Fair Public Trial**

The constitution provides for an independent judiciary, but courts sometimes appeared to lack impartiality and arrived at politically motivated outcomes or



without individual findings of guilt, according to multiple human rights groups. The government generally respected court orders, but human rights organizations claimed the SSSP bypassed court orders to release detainees by arresting them again in a new case, in some instances on the same charges.

According to the constitution, detainees have the right to challenge the legality of their detention before a court, which must decide within one week if the detention is lawful or otherwise immediately release the detainee, but authorities regularly deprived individuals of this right, according to international and local human rights groups.

The law imposes penalties on individuals designated by a court as terrorists, even without criminal convictions, such as imposing travel bans, asset freezes, passport cancellation, and loss of professional credentials and political rights. The government has designated the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist group and prosecutes individuals for alleged membership in or support for the Muslim Brotherhood. An individual may appeal this designation directly to the country's highest appeals court, but authorities failed to inform most individuals of their impending designation before the court ruled.

The constitution states that civilians may not stand trial before military courts except for specific enumerated crimes that are linked to the military. Nonetheless, under the state of emergency that expired in October 2021, authorities regularly used military courts as well as emergency courts to try civilians accused of threatening national security. Cases initiated before the state of emergency's conclusion nonetheless continued under the former emergency court system rather than being moved to civilian courts. Public information concerning military trials was limited. Military trials were difficult to monitor because media were usually subjected to restraint orders. Rights groups and lawyers stated defense attorneys in military trials had difficulty gaining access to their clients and to documentation related to the cases.

The Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and local and international NGOs expressed concerns regarding death sentences and lengthy prison terms imposed in trials that did not meet international standards for fairness. Some trials involving hundreds of defendants continued, particularly in cases from

2013 and 2014 involving demonstrators sympathetic to former president Morsi and the Muslim Brotherhood.

In February the Office of Ratification of Judgements of the State Security Emergency Court ratified the December 2021 emergency court verdict sentencing blogger Mohamed “Oxygen” Ibrahim to four years for “spreading false news.” The two years Ibrahim spent in pretrial detention were not to be counted toward the sentence. Rights groups decried the trial in the emergency courts as improper and unfair, and criticized the decision not to credit his pretrial detention as a violation of the law. Lawyers for Ibrahim also announced in February they would file a lawsuit against the government to allow family visitation, which had been denied to Ibrahim for more than two years. As of year’s end, Ibrahim remained in detention without family visitations.

## **Trial Procedures**

The law provides for the right to a fair and public trial, but the judiciary often failed to uphold this right.

The law presumes defendants are innocent, and authorities usually inform defendants promptly of charges against them. Defendants have the right to be present at their trials. Attendance is mandatory for individuals charged with felonies and optional for those charged with misdemeanors. Human rights lawyers and organizations stated that defendants sometimes were not informed during interrogations and detentions of the charges against them. These groups also observed defendants were not always present during legal proceedings, particularly during renewal hearings for pretrial detention.

Civilian criminal and misdemeanor trials usually are public. During the year authorities routinely prevented representatives of civil society, media, foreign embassies, and family members from attending trial and pretrial detention hearings. Human rights groups stated detained or imprisoned defendants regularly were denied access to lawyers. Rights groups alleged routine violations of due process as defendants were not permitted to call or question witnesses or present evidence, as the law requires.

The constitution provides for the right of an accused person to remain silent in his

own trial. Defendants have the right of appeal up to the Court of Cassation. Judicial and executive review is available to individuals sentenced to the death penalty. Judges must seek the nonbinding opinion of the grand mufti on all death sentences, and the president must confirm all such sentences.

According to human rights groups, defendants sometimes faced: difficulties in getting sufficient information concerning the charges and accusations in their case, long delays before commencing a trial, pro forma hearings limiting their ability to mount an effective defense, and limited communication with their attorneys while in detention. Legal observers and rights groups indicated lawyers were sometimes denied sufficient access to detained clients and did not always have the required access to evidence and files against the accused. Rights groups also claimed that family and members of legal teams sometimes were denied access to state security emergency court hearings and trials and that detainees lacked full access to legal counsel and documents related to their charges.

Human rights lawyers observed that evidence was often not clearly connected to or sufficient to substantiate the charges against their clients, such as which banned group a client was accused of joining or what “false news” the client allegedly spread. Multiple organizations criticized pro forma court sessions, especially for pretrial detention renewals, in which judges hear dozens or hundreds of detention renewal applications with insufficient time to present a defense. Additionally, former detainees stated they were sometimes not in the courtroom during those hearings due to delays in arrival to the courthouse or other bureaucratic problems.

Seven human rights organizations issued a statement in August condemning the continued imprisonment of journalists, bloggers, online content creators, and others under Case 440 and Case 441 of 2022. Dozens of defendants in these cases were arrested between April and July and faced the same list of charges, all of which were based on national security investigations, despite defendants’ different fields of work, and differing circumstances of their arrests and investigations. The organizations demanded the closure of the file and immediate release of all detained in the case. The organizations further demanded a halt to the use of dubious charges, such as “joining a terrorist group” without specifying the group, and “spreading false news” for social media posts. Among those accused in the cases was television presenter Hala Fahmy. Fahmy was reportedly arrested in

April due to her outspoken criticisms on social media of the government's economic policies, solidarity with and participation in workers' protests at the Radio and Television Union Building in Cairo (Maspero), and for her critical views of the deteriorating economic situation. As of year's end, Fahmy remained in pretrial detention.

The law permits individual members of the public to file complaints with the prosecutor general, who is charged with deciding whether the evidence justifies referring the charges for a trial. Legal observers reported, however, that due to unclear evidentiary standards, vague definitions of crimes such as terrorism, and broad interpretations of the legal provisions, the Prosecutor General's Office investigated and referred for trial the majority of cases, regardless of the strength of the evidence.

Military courts are not open to the public. Defendants in military courts nominally enjoyed the same fair-trial assurances as those in civilian courts, but the military judiciary has wide discretion to curtail these rights on public security grounds and regularly did so. Military courts often tried defendants in a matter of hours, frequently in groups, and sometimes without access to an attorney, leading lawyers and NGOs to assert military courts did not meet basic standards of due process and undermined fair-trial assurances. Defendants in military courts have the right to consult an attorney, but sometimes authorities denied them timely access to counsel. According to rights groups, authorities permitted defendants in military trials visits from their attorneys only once every six months, in contrast with the civilian court system, where authorities allowed detained defendant attorney visits every 15 days.

The military judiciary law governing the military court system grants defendants the right to appeal up to the Supreme Military Court of Appeals. The president or his delegate must certify sentences by military courts. There were limited media and NGO reports concerning the ratification of military court sentences.

State security emergency courts, which were activated pursuant to the nationwide state of emergency in effect between 2017 and October 2021 and continued during the year to try cases initiated during that period, had expansive jurisdiction concerning any cases related to the state of emergency, including several

politically motivated cases. By law verdicts in state security emergency courts have no avenue for judicial appeals and require ratification, annulment, amendment, or an order for retrial by the president or his delegate.

In June lawyers for university student Patrick George Zaki requested a suspension in his trial before an emergency court in order to challenge the court's authority to hear the case. The defense team argued the case should be tried in a normal misdemeanor court rather than an emergency court, whose verdicts cannot be appealed, according to media reports. The court did not act on the request. Zaki faced charges of inciting individuals to protest in 2019, "spreading false news," "promoting terrorism," and "harming national security." He had been held in pretrial detention from his 2020 arrest at Cairo International Airport until December 2021, during which time he was beaten and subjected to electric shocks, according to media and NGO reports. Zaki remained subject to a travel ban at year's end while his trial continued.

### **Political Prisoners and Detainees**

There were reports of significant numbers of political prisoners and detainees, although verifiable precise figures were not available.

In April President Sisi called for a national dialogue to address political, economic, and social challenges facing the country, including human rights. At year's end, the dialogue's launch remained pending following the establishment of a board of trustees and relevant committees. In August a group of local and international human rights organizations demanded the release of political prisoners, including six imprisoned human rights defenders as representatives of the organizations in the dialogue, and called for their release: Ezzat Ghoneim, Mohamed el-Baqer, Alaa Abdel Fattah, Haitham Mohamadeen, Ziyad el-Aleimy, and Ibrahim Metwally. Two of these human rights defenders, Haitham Mohamadeen and Ziyad el-Aleimy, were subsequently released, but the rest remained in prison at year's end.

In 2021 the State Security Prosecution referred human rights lawyer and executive director of the Egyptian Coordination for Rights and Freedoms Ezzat Ghoneim to trial before an emergency court on charges including joining and financing the

Muslim Brotherhood, “deliberately broadcasting false news,” and “disturbing security.” Ghoneim had been in pretrial detention since his 2018 arrest and was “recycled” onto a second case in May 2020 and a third case in May 2021, all on similar charges. He remained imprisoned at year’s end.

In January Ramy Kamel, a Coptic Christian human rights activist, was released pending investigation after being held in pretrial detention since 2019.

In February the Middle East Studies Association called on President Sisi and the public prosecutor to release translators Kholoud Said and Marwa Arafa, as well as all other “prisoners of conscience.” Said was released pending investigation in June, while Arafa remained in pretrial detention on charges of joining and financing a terrorist group, according to media reports. Rights groups continued to call for her release from arbitrary detention.

In March dozens of politicians, human rights activists, and family members launched the “A Thousand Days is Enough” social media campaign to call for the release of detainees in the “Hope Cell” case, which included defendants arrested in 2019 after meeting to form the Alliance of Hope political group to run in parliamentary elections. Three of the detainees, Hossam Moanes, Hisham Fouad, and Ziyad el-Aleimy, received presidential pardons in the following months. The defense team told local press that “many legal violations took place in this case” and claimed they were not given access to more than 1,000 prosecution documents.

The UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders released a joint communication with other UN special rapporteurs in May expressing concern regarding fair trial and due process violations in the December 2021 conviction of human rights lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer for “spreading false news.” The statement alleged el-Baqer was referred to an emergency court in a new case in 2021 to face charges without the knowledge of his lawyers, after his initial detention in 2019, and that his lawyers were denied access to his case file to prepare an adequate defense. The statement expressed concern regarding el-Baqer’s arbitrary detention, continued detention under pending charges, as well as his conviction and continued inclusion in the terrorist watch list without apparent evidence. The group of rapporteurs further expressed concern regarding unsanitary prison conditions, inadequate medical care, and denial of access to

family and legal representatives. Human rights organizations called for el-Baqer's release and claimed his imprisonment was politically motivated due to his work as a rights lawyer on prominent cases, including the 2021 emergency court prosecution of Alaa Abdel Fattah. At year's end, el-Baqer remained in prison.

Human rights lawyer Amr Emam was released in July following an announcement by a member of the Presidential Pardon Committee that the SSSP had ordered him set free. Emam was arrested in 2019 after he began a hunger strike and sit-in to protest the arrests, alleged abuse, and continued detention of journalist Esraa Abdel Fattah, activist Alaa Abdel Fattah, and lawyer Mohamed el-Baqer. Emam, formerly with the Arabic Network for Human Rights Information (ANHRI), was charged with colluding with a terrorist organization, "publishing false news," and "misusing social media to spread false information."

**Amnesty:** The government periodically issued pardons of prisoners on national and religious holidays, sometimes including individuals whose cases human rights organizations considered to be politically motivated. Government statements and local press reported thousands of prisoners were pardoned and released on several occasions throughout the year, but only a small number of those pardoned were individuals detained on politically motivated charges.

## **Transnational Repression**

**Threats, Harassment, Surveillance, and Coercion:** In February the UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders released a statement of concern for reprisals by the government against Ahmed Mefreh, executive director of the Geneva-based Committee for Justice, for cooperating with the United Nations. The statement alleged that state security officers questioned members of Mefreh's family, including his brother in October 2021. According to the statement, Mefreh's brother was questioned regarding his communications with him, was asked to grant police access to his messaging applications and social media accounts, and was told "it would be a shame on us if we punish you because of your brother."

In February foreign-based Egyptian activist Ali Hussein Mahdy released a video addressing state security officials, saying the message was received after his father asked him to stop his activities against the Egyptian state. His father's request

allegedly came after the father was summoned and questioned several times by state security officials. In response to the intimidation of his father, Mahdy pledged to refrain from posting leaked information, stop his human rights activities from abroad, cut off communications with foreign officials and journalists, and refrain from criticizing President Sisi or other state institutions. He temporarily refrained broadcasting on social media but returned to his platforms before year's end.

In an August post on social media, a human rights lawyer called on authorities to release two brothers, Eid and Hassan el-Shazly, whom the lawyer claimed had been arrested to silence their sister, who lived abroad and allegedly posted videos criticizing the government. The two brothers had reportedly been in pretrial detention for two years, pending investigations on charges of “spreading false news,” “misusing social media,” and joining a terrorist group.

### **Civil Judicial Procedures and Remedies**

Individuals have access to civil courts for lawsuits relating to human rights abuses and filed such lawsuits during the year. Nonetheless, courts routinely dismissed such cases or acquitted alleged abusers, claiming evidence was insufficient or witness testimonies conflicted. Individuals and organizations may appeal adverse court decisions to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. In December former detainee Ramy Shaath filed a complaint with the African Commission seeking compensation for rights and due process violations during his detention and trial as well as his forced renunciation of Egyptian nationality as a condition of his release.

### **Property Seizure and Restitution**

During heightened counterterrorism operations in 2018, authorities demolished homes and commercial buildings and seized farmland to create a buffer zone along the Gaza Strip. Authorities subsequently established a mechanism for residents to file for compensation for their losses resulting from counterterrorism operations writ large. The Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights (Standing Committee) and the NCHR investigated grievances on this matter from North Sinai residents in 2021. According to the NCHR, North Sinai residents continued to



register complaints concerning the slow compensation distribution that coincided with rising construction costs and inflation, which made it difficult to use reimbursements to acquire a comparable house or plot of land elsewhere. Residents also complained of lack of documentation regarding ownership, maximum compensation limits, and the government's inability to conduct assessments due to insecurity.

Although positive steps regarding compensation reportedly were made for the damage Nubians suffered because of two phases of the Aswan Dam project completed in 1902 and 1971, no land return had occurred as of year's end. During the year the government provided compensation to more than 4,100 Nubians, according to the cabinet. The government noted that compensation for those no longer residing in Aswan would be considered at a later stage. Nubian activists complained compensation was disbursed only to those who could provide documents proving their properties had been destroyed.

#### **f. Arbitrary or Unlawful Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence**

The constitution provides for the privacy of the home, correspondence, telephone calls, and other means of communication. Nevertheless, there were reports that security agencies regularly placed human rights defenders, political activists, journalists, foreigners, and writers under surveillance; monitored their private communications; screened their correspondence, including email and social media accounts; examined their bank records; searched their persons and homes without judicial authorization; and extrajudicially confiscated personal property. Ahead of planned protests or demonstrations, there were reports police stopped young persons in public places and searched their mobile phones for evidence of involvement in political activities or criticism of the government.

The constitution provides for the right to privacy, including on the internet, and for the confidentiality and "inviolability" of postal, telegraphic, and electronic correspondence; telephone calls; and other means of communication, but the law allows the president to issue written or oral directives to monitor and intercept all forms of communication and correspondence, impose censorship prior to publication, and confiscate publications.

Surveillance was a significant concern for internet users. Judicial warrants are required for authorities to enter, search, or monitor private property such as homes. The government's surveillance operations lacked transparency, potentially violating the constitution's privacy protections. There were credible reports the government monitored private online communications without appropriate legal authority, including using cyberattacks to gain access to devices and accounts belonging to human rights defenders, other civil society members, and actual or perceived critics of the government.

According to Freedom House's 2022 *Freedom in the World* report, the Anti-Cyber and Information Technology Crimes Law requires telecommunications companies to store users' data for 180 days, further enabling widespread government surveillance.

An independent media outlet reported increased security measures in the days leading up to the anniversary of the January 25 revolution. The outlet reported police officers asked owners of garages in areas near Tahrir Square to provide information regarding cars and their drivers in their garages. A prominent lawyer said that other practices leading up to the anniversary included increased inspections of mobile phones, more security checkpoints, and demanding rental contracts from owners for buildings near Tahrir Square. Human rights lawyers stated to local media that these measures spread geographically during the year, targeting residents as far as Giza and Nasr City.

## **g. Conflict-related Abuses**

Violence continued in North Sinai between government security forces, terrorist organizations, and other armed groups (including militias and criminal gangs). The government continued to impose restrictions on local residents' travel outside North Sinai and general movement within North Sinai Governorate and severely restricted media access to North Sinai. On March 30, the House of Representatives approved President Sisi's decision to extend security measures, including curfews and evacuations, on the Sinai Peninsula for a further six months, starting on April 3, to "confront the dangers of terrorist crimes." Rights groups and media reports assessed that the greatest threats to civilians come from improvised explosive devices left in civilian areas by ISIS-Sinai Province and as a result of exchanges of

fire between government security forces, ISIS-Sinai, and other armed groups. There were reports of killings by ISIS and extrajudicial killings of detainees by progovernment tribal militia.

According to the *Conduct in UN Field Missions* online portal, three allegations against Egyptian military officers deployed to the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic (MINUSCA) remained pending at year's end; the charges from 2021 and 2020 included sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, and soliciting transactions for sex. A fourth allegation was dismissed as unsubstantiated.

**Killings:** The government acknowledged no civilian deaths due to security force actions during the year. Military officials periodically reported on operations that lead to the death of ISIS fighters, including several leaders of the group. Human rights organizations alleged that some persons killed by security forces were civilians. In July the London-based Sinai Foundation for Human Rights released a report covering 2021, documenting the killing of 32 civilians, including seven children, and the injury of 17 others by the parties. According to the report, government forces were responsible for seven deaths through artillery fire and shooting incidents at checkpoints. ISIS-Sinai Province was responsible for 25 deaths through improvised explosive devices and unlawful killings.

In August the Sinai Foundation for Human Rights issued a report alleging unlawful killings by progovernment tribal militia groups in the Sinai Peninsula. The report included separate videos of the killing of an unarmed man and an injured youth, possibly a minor. Additional video showed a man in the custody of a militia and photographs appearing to show the same individual after being killed. According to the report, several tribal militias and affiliated groups posted the videos and images to their social media accounts in July and August.

Terrorist and other armed groups continued to target the armed forces and civilians with gunfire, improvised explosive devices, and other tactics. In May ISIS attacked a water pumping station along the Suez Canal and killed or wounded 17 soldiers, according to media reports and video of the attack released by the group. The terrorist group claimed responsibility for an attack on Rafah outpost four days later that killed one soldier and left four injured, according to an official statement

from the military.

In August rights groups and media reported the killing of two Coptic men in the Gelbana area in Sinai. Members of ISIS-Sinai Province reportedly shot and killed Salama Moussa Waheeb and Hani Salama Moussa while they were farming.

According to an Islamic State infographic released during the year, which provided an annual assessment of the terrorist organization's attacks worldwide, ISIS-Sinai Province claimed 101 attacks in the Sinai region resulting in 206 casualties in 2021.

**Abductions:** Terrorist groups and other armed groups abducted civilians in North Sinai, almost always alleging cooperation with the government as the rationale. According to human rights groups, in some cases terrorist groups and other armed groups released abductees, in others, they shot or beheaded their victims.

In February ISIS released a video of its January 24 killing of an abducted Egyptian national, whom the group alleged was a “spy” who had assisted in the capture of ISIS militants.

In February local media reported the abduction of two young men by unspecified gunmen from a quarry in central Sinai that often worked with the Armed Forces Engineering Authority.

In August local media reported ISIS kidnapped three civilians during clashes between ISIS militants and progovernment militia near the village of Gelbana in the Sinai. There were no updates on the abductees' conditions at year's end.

## **Section 2. Respect for Civil Liberties**

### **a. Freedom of Expression, Including for Members of the Press and Other Media**

The constitution provides for freedom of expression, including for members of the press and other media, allowing “limited censorship in times of war or public mobilization”; however, the government frequently did not respect this right. Human rights defenders, journalists, activists, and others regularly faced criminal

prosecution on charges that observers assessed were brought in response to criticism of the government. According to the law, newspapers are required to print their issues at licensed printing houses registered with the Supreme Council for Media Regulation; news websites must host their servers in the country; newspapers must submit 20 copies of each printed issue to the council; and news websites and television outlets must keep copies of all published or broadcast material online for one year and submit a copy of their published or broadcast material to the council every month. The law also prohibits any recording, filming, or interviews in public places with the intention of broadcasting them on a media outlet without a permit issued by the council.

**Freedom of Expression:** Citizens expressed their views on a wide range of political and social topics. The government regularly investigated and prosecuted individuals for expressing political views or criticism, using charges such as “spreading false news,” supporting a banned group, incitement of violence, insults to religion, insults to public figures and institutions such as the judiciary and the military, or abuse of public morals. The government used social media posts as evidence in many cases, according to multiple human rights lawyers.

The law provides a broad definition of terrorism, to include “any act harming national unity or social peace.” Human rights observers noted that authorities regularly used the ambiguous definition to stifle nonviolent speech and nonviolent opposition activity. In a March report on freedom of expression, a local rights group highlighted the limitations created by restrictions on freedom of expression in various fields, including human rights advocacy, freedom of assembly, media freedom, freedom of expression online, academic freedom, and creative arts such as music.

In September RSF released a statement saying the government’s systematic repression of journalists had not abated since the government released its *National Strategy for Human Rights* in 2021. The group declared that eight journalists had been released from detention in the past six months, but 22 others remained in detention. As of December, the Committee to Protect Journalists reported 21 journalists were imprisoned in the country.

Freelance journalist and tour guide Donia Samir Fathi claimed in a Facebook video

in April that the governor of South Sinai sexually harassed her. Instead of investigating her alleged harasser, the SSSP charged Fathi on May 29 with joining a terrorist group, “spreading false news,” misusing social media, and promoting a terrorist crime. She remained in pretrial detention at year’s end.

In April prosecutors ordered the detention on charges of spreading false news for three TikTok satirists who had posted two videos concerning food price increases that were viewed millions of times. According to public statements by their lawyer, the men did not have political objectives and were only trying to attract views on their social media platforms for economic benefit. Commentators observed the arrests came at a time of soaring food prices that some feared could lead to social unrest. The three were released in May.

Rights groups and media reports indicated that in July the SSSP ordered the detention of two journalists, Hani Abdel Rahman Ismail, director of the *al-Masry al-Youm* newspaper office in Ismailia and correspondent for MBC Egypt, and Mohamed Gomaa Mubarak Ahmed, reporter at *al-Wafd* newspaper. The journalists faced charges of joining a terrorist group, broadcasting “false news,” and misusing an account on social media. The charges stemmed from a video in which they criticized the use of government-owned kiosks in Ismailia as a space for illegal drug use. During their detention, the Ministry of Interior released a video on July 22 that included so-called confessions that they had fabricated their videos in exchange for money. Human rights lawyers criticized the release of the confession videos as a violation of criminal procedure code.

In August a coalition of rights groups released a statement demanding the release of journalists, bloggers, and content creators detained for exercising their right to express their opinion on social media. The group also called on authorities to stop abusing terrorism charges to prosecute persons who disagreed with government policies.

A number of prominent figures previously imprisoned for allegations related to freedom of expression received pardons or were released from detention during the year, including Hisham Fouad, Hossam Moanes, Ramy Shaath, and Ramy Kamel. In April Ibrahim Ezzedine was released after 1,050 days of pretrial detention without ever facing charges. According to rights groups, Ezzedine, like most

released detainees, was released without authorities closing the case against him, leaving him open to potential rearrest under the original charges of “spreading false news” and joining a banned group, in response to his criticisms of the government’s urban slum policies. In July the SSSP released human rights lawyer Mohamed Ramadan, pending charges of “joining a terrorist group.” Ramadan was arrested in 2018 after publishing a picture declaring his solidarity with the yellow vest protests in France. He was then “recycled” into three different cases with accusations of joining a terrorist group, according to rights groups, to prolong his pretrial detention well beyond legal limits.

**Violence and Harassment:** According to media reports and local and international human rights groups, authorities harassed and intimidated journalists during the year.

The Arab Network for Research and Publishing stated on January 27 that banners were torn down and employees forced to leave the Cairo Book Fair following the closure of the Cairo and Alexandria libraries affiliated with the network. The chairman of the board for the network cited harassment, security restrictions, repeated visits by state security officers, detention of employees, and seizure of book shipments as reasons for the closure. In April journalist Mohamed Salah was released along with approximately 40 other pretrial detainees. According to Amnesty International, Salah spent 29 months in detention without trial or formal charges. He faced accusations of joining a terrorist group and “spreading false news” in 2019 and similar charges in a second case filed in 2020 after a court ordered his release in the 2019 investigation. Human rights groups previously stated Salah was abused by authorities while in prison, including being stripped of his clothing along with his cellmates, suspended in a hallway, and beaten with metal objects.

**Censorship or Content Restrictions for Members of the Press and Other Media, Including Online Media:** Independent media expressed a variety of views but with significant restrictions, and official censorship occurred. The constitution, penal code, and the media and publications law prescribe media conduct. The government regulated the licensing of newspapers and controlled the printing and distribution of most newspapers, including private newspapers. The law does not impose restrictions on newspaper ownership.

Under the law, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation (SCMR) is an independent body with members selected by the president to regulate the media sector. The SCMR issues licenses for media outlets and websites, has the authority to block websites, and monitors media funding and content. More than 20 state-owned media outlets broadly supported official state policy. The National Press Authority held the power to appoint and dismiss editorial leadership of state-owned print outlets. The governmental Egyptian Radio and Television Union appointed the heads of state-owned radio and television channels. Both state-owned and private media (including television and online news sites) occasionally broadcast and published mild criticism of government policies, but dominant media narratives supported the president and his policy initiatives.

Multiple rights groups and independent media reported various types of censorship. A March report on freedom of expression by a local human rights group found that the SCMR continued to ignore requests by privately owned news websites to obtain licenses, despite the fact that most of these websites submitted license requests more than three years earlier. While the SCMR issued licenses to many state-owned news websites and a limited number of privately owned websites in April, the report described the overall licensing process as politicized and concluded the SCMR's objective was to deprive opposition and independent websites of legal protections.

Local media reported in May that the progovernment United Media Services Company, parent company of multiple media outlets, issued instructions to its newspaper and television content managers not to publish news regarding the opposition "civil democratic movement" (CDM) ahead of the national dialogue (see section 1.e.). The CDM included some of the leading opposition figures, including former presidential candidate Hamdeen Sabahi, Reform and Development Party leader Mohamed Anwar al-Sadat, al-Karama Party leader Ahmed al-Tantawi, and Conservative Party leader Akmal Kurtam.

RSF released a report in June accusing progovernment television personalities and state-controlled media of launching and amplifying "smear campaigns" against journalists critical of the government. The report detailed accusations of progovernment presenters accusing journalists critical of official policy of "plotting against Egypt" and "fueling hatred of the army." According to the report,



these campaigns led to self-censorship and fear among independent journalists of arrest on vague charges such as being “traitors to the nation” or “agents of chaos.”

Police arrested several journalists during the year for covering politically sensitive topics. Some of those arrested were released, while others remained in detention at year’s end. Three reporters from the independent news outlet *Mada Masr* were charged in September with “spreading false news,” misusing social media, and defaming members of the progovernment Nation’s Future Party, following an article alleging party members would be removed from their posts due to corruption allegations. The *Mada Masr* editor in chief, Lina Attalah, was additionally charged with operating a website without a license. *Mada Masr* maintained it had applied several times for a license starting in 2018 but had never received a reply from the government, and it defended its reporting by noting the information came from multiple sources. All four defendants were released on bail pending trials, which had not commenced by year’s end.

As of year’s end, photojournalist Hamdy al-Zaeem had been in pretrial detention for more than 700 days despite what his family said was a lack of evidence and authorities applying the same charges for a second time in a new case. Al-Zaeem was arrested in January 2021, one day after covering labor protests at a chemical plant, on charges of “spreading false news,” misuse of social media, and promoting the purpose of a terrorist organization. He had faced similar charges in 2016, was held in pretrial detention until 2018, and then was under precautionary measures requiring he sign in at a police station several days per week, until he was arrested again in 2021. He remained in detention at year’s end.

On May 29, the Emergency State Security Criminal Court sentenced *al-Jazeera* journalist Ahmed Taha in absentia to 15 years imprisonment and ordered his name to be placed on Egypt’s national terrorist list. According to *al-Jazeera*, the charges of “spreading false news,” harming the country’s national interests, and endangering public safety and security stemmed from an interview Taha conducted with a prominent opposition figure and former presidential candidate in 2018. Seven human rights organizations condemned the verdict for Taha and 23 other defendants in the case on May 30 as resulting from unfair trials.

Media rights organizations stated the government blocked thousands of websites,

including at least 129 news websites, including *Mada Masr*, *al-Manassa*, and *Daarb*. In 2017 the news website *Mada Masr* sued the government seeking information on why it was blocked. In 2018 the Court of Administrative Justice referred the case for technical review by the Justice Ministry's Authority of Experts. This review remained pending at year's end, and the website remained blocked within the country.

On July 14, authorities blocked *al-Manassa*'s website inside of the country for the 13th time since 2017. In response, 28 local and international organizations released a statement calling on authorities to lift the ban against the news site. Nonetheless, the website remained blocked at year's end. During Egypt's hosting of the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Sharm el-Sheikh under the auspices of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change on November 6-20, several NGO and media websites reportedly were unblocked temporarily, although many outlets reported they were blocked again during or after COP27's conclusion.

The law considers websites and social media accounts with at least 5,000 subscribers to be media outlets, requires them to pay a licensing fee, and grants the SCMR broad discretion to block their content. In April the SCMR issued 12 decisions to close and block websites, social media accounts, YouTube channels and the application, stating that these platforms violated media codes and standards or were not properly licensed in accordance with a 2018 law regulating the press and media. The justifications for the decisions included allegations of broadcasting "false news," inciting violence and hatred, and insulting individuals or religious beliefs.

Arrests for media activity and social media posts reportedly had a chilling effect on online speech. Some activists and many journalists reported privately that they self-censored criticism of the government or comments that could be perceived as sympathetic to the Muslim Brotherhood or other banned groups, in view of the progovernment media environment. Publishers also were wary of publishing books that criticized religious institutions, such as al-Azhar, or challenged Islamic doctrine. Online journalists were also reluctant to discuss sensitive topics due to fear of reprisal, including prosecution and detention.

**Libel/Slander Laws:** Libel, slander, and defamation are criminal offenses under the law. Rights campaigners accused government authorities of weaponizing libel and slander laws to silence survivors of gender-based violence and their supporters, such as human rights defender and journalist Rasha Azab. Azab initially faced up to two years in prison and a fine for insult, defamation, and intentionally disturbing film director Islam Azazi, after Azab made social media posts expressing support for women accusing Azazi of sexual assault. The economic court in Cairo dismissed the charges and civil suit in April.

Blasphemy is a criminal offense. Local and international rights groups reported cases of authorities charging and convicting individuals with denigrating religion under the so-called blasphemy law, targeting primarily Christians but also Muslims. In September the Appeals Chamber of Misdemeanors of the Economic Court in Cairo upheld a sentence of five years in prison with hard labor for Marco Gerges for contempt of Islam, transgression against the values of the Egyptian family, and exploiting religion in promoting extremist ideas. The rights group defending Gerges argued there was little relationship between the charges and the evidence presented against him, which consisted of sexual images and comments regarding religion exchanged in private messages on his telephone. The defense stressed that no pictures or comments were posted to the internet and argued the basis for the investigation and prosecution was an illegal search.

**National Security:** The law allows government censors to block the publication of information related to intelligence and national security. The government maintained hotlines for members of the public to report “false news” in either traditional or social media that supposedly endangers state security. The law imposes a fine between 5,000 and 20,000 Egyptian pounds (EGP) (\$201-\$806) on any person who “intentionally publishes...or spreads false news.”

Rights groups and lawyers asserted the government used terrorism charges to target government critics and deter criticism of the government officials or policies that would otherwise be considered freedom of expression.

In April the SSSP charged El-Hussaini Farghaly with joining a terrorist group, spreading false news, and inciting a terrorist act. Farghaly’s arrest and detention followed the posting of videos on his YouTube channel discussing the Grand

Ethiopian Renaissance Dam. Farghaly remained in detention at year's end. Gamal Mohamed Salama was arrested in April on charges of joining a terrorist organization and "spreading false news" after posting a TikTok video with a satirical song concerning recent price hikes on basic goods. Salama was released in September, according to a local rights group.

The SSSP ordered the detention of the creators of a satirical video one day after it was posted in August. Ahmed Wafik Ibrahim El-Desouky, Hamada Somaïda, Fayza Fawzy Ibrahim, Mohammed Abdullah Shawky, and Karim Ragab Abdel Tawab were charged with joining a terrorist group, "spreading false news," and misusing a means of social media. In the video, the actors portray a police officer who arrests a girl and a young man in a car on the basis that they committed an indecent act on the public road. After their arrest, the Ministry of Interior published a video containing the defendants' confession of fabricating the clearly satirical video.

Judges may issue restraining orders to prohibit media from reporting on court cases authorities deemed sensitive on national security grounds. Rights groups stated authorities misused the orders to shield government, police, or military officials from public scrutiny. Citing safety and security measures, the government and military restricted media access to many parts of North Sinai, where there were numerous abuses reported (see section 1.g.).

## **Internet Freedom**

The constitution prohibits the government from "arbitrarily" interrupting, disconnecting, or depriving citizens seeking to use all forms of internet communications.

Telecommunications services and internet service providers are regulated under the telecommunication regulation law by the National Telecommunications Regulatory Authority, which is not independent of the government. The government centralized control of the internet infrastructure and fiber-optic cables, including restricting and disrupting user access and censoring online content. Law enforcement agencies restricted or disrupted individuals' access to the internet, and the government monitored social media accounts and internet usage. The public

prosecutor investigated and brought charges against individuals accused of posting material deemed “insulting.”

The counterterrorism law criminalizes the use of the internet to “promote ideas or beliefs that call for terrorist acts” or to “broadcast what is intended to mislead security authorities or influence the course of justice in relation to any terrorist crime.” The law also authorizes the public prosecutor and investigators to monitor and record online communications among suspects in terrorism cases for a period of 30 days, renewable in 30-day increments. The law does not specify a maximum period for this surveillance.

The cybercrime law broadly empowers investigating authorities to order the blocking of any website whose content they determine is criminal or “poses a threat to national security or endangers the security or economy of the country.”

The government attempted to disrupt the communications of terrorist groups operating in Sinai by cutting mobile services, internet, and sometimes landlines, often cutting off service to civilians as well.

The *Freedom on the Net* report for 2022 stated internet freedom and the rights of internet users were severely constrained in the country. According to the report, website blocking, removal of content, criminal penalties, harassment, and surveillance contributed to high levels of self-censorship among Egyptian internet users.

In April the Cairo Criminal Court reduced the sentence against TikTok influencer Haneen Hossam to three years in prison and a fine of EGP 200,000 (\$8,060) on human trafficking charges (from an original 10-year sentence), after she encouraged other young women to earn money through posting video content. Local and international activists denounced the charges. Her appeal before the Court of Cassation remained pending at year’s end.

In May the Court of Cassation declined to hear an appeal for TikTok influencers Sherifa Rifaat, known as “Sherry Hanim,” and her daughter Zumoroda, saying it did not have jurisdiction in the case. The court of appeals reduced their sentences from six to five years following complaints they “incited immorality” and “spread obscenity” by posting videos on social media of themselves dancing. There were

reports authorities monitored and exploited social media and internet dating sites to identify and arrest lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex individuals (see section 6, Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics).

There were reports the government temporarily blocked access to functionality on internet messaging applications, such as WhatsApp's calling feature.

In an August statement, a group of local and international media rights organization reported that the state continued to block hundreds of websites, including 129 news websites. The blocked sites included international NGOs, local human rights NGOs, and numerous virtual private network services. Some blockages appeared to respond to critical coverage of the government or to disrupt antigovernment political activity or demonstrations. Some of these websites were fully or partially unblocked during COP27 held in Sharm el-Sheikh in November, but most were again blocked after COP27 concluded.

According to local media reports, the Supreme Council for Media Regulation issued 100 new licenses in June for certain media platforms considered by many commentators to be progovernment, even though multiple independent websites and news platforms continue to wait for licenses, often for years.

### **Restrictions on Academic Freedom and Cultural Events**

There were reports of government restrictions on academic freedom and cultural events. Authorities continued to remove references to the country's 2011 and 2013 revolutions from high school history class curricula, in line with a 2017 decree from the Ministry of Education and Technical Education.

According to media and local rights groups, academics practiced self-censorship similar to that reported by nonacademic commentators when publicly commenting on sensitive political and socioeconomic matters. University faculty members and Ministry of Education employees, including teachers, required security agency approval to travel abroad for academic or professional purposes. Faculty and officials at public universities and research centers also required permission from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to travel abroad for any reason. Some public

universities restricted campus visits by foreign speakers or delegations or required faculty chaperones for delegations of university students traveling abroad.

Rights groups and academics outside the country issued statements and reports documenting the difficulties faced by academics in Egypt and scholars based outside the country conducting research on sensitive subjects. In January a local rights group issued a report examining the pressures facing academics studying and working abroad, including arrest, conviction, and travel bans for researchers in addition to pressures on family members in the country and targeting by security services abroad. The report highlighted a July 2021 statement from the minister of immigration indicating students were the most dangerous segment of citizens abroad due to their exposure to false ideas from parties hostile to the country.

In July the Middle East Studies Association expressed concern regarding the persistent attacks on academic freedom. It noted some arrested academics remained in pretrial detention, while others faced trial on “baseless” charges, and authorities imposed travel bans and restricted the movements of some academic researchers within the country even after the court proceedings were completed.

On March 31, the Cairo Criminal Court issued a suspended sentence of one year of hard labor and an EGP 20,000 (\$725) fine for Cairo University media professor Ayman Mansour Nada on charges of insulting a member of the SCMR. Nada was originally arrested in September 2021 after he criticized the government-appointed president of Cairo University and government-aligned media professionals and was released in November of the same year. The court dismissed other charges, including “spreading false news.”

In September the Supreme Administrative Court rejected an appeal seeking the reinstatement of Mona Prince, an instructor at Suez University. The university dismissed Prince in 2018 after she posted video clips of herself dancing and encouraging students to do so as well, according to media reports. The court justified the decision, saying such videos degraded the prestige of a university professor. The court also explained Prince departed from approved curriculum and did not adhere to accepted religious dogma while teaching *Paradise Lost* by John Milton. The court condemned her instruction methods and asserted that religious dictates necessarily limited academic freedom.

There was censorship of cultural events. According to a prime ministerial decree, it is unlawful to hold a special event or festival without “prior license from the Ministry of Culture and liaising with relevant state entities.” This requirement adds to existing regulations, under which organizations must obtain a permit from the Ministry of Culture’s Censorship Board, as well as permits from the Interior Ministry and the relevant artists’ union for concerts, performances, and other cultural events. The Ministry of Culture must approve all scripts and final productions of plays and films. The ministry censored foreign films to be shown in theaters but did not censor the same films sold as DVDs.

The government-adjacent Musicians Syndicate prohibited nonmember artists from performing in the country. On January 17, the syndicate reversed a 2021 decision to ban from the artists’ union any singers of Mahraganat music, a popular genre previously deemed objectionable on the grounds it supposedly promoted sex, drugs and “depravity,” according to media reports.

In March an Alexandria Economic Court convicted two singers, Hamo Beeka and Omar Kamal, on charges of violating family values and profiting from a video that included dancing and singing along with a Brazilian belly dancer. The court sentenced them to one year in prison and an EGP 10,000 (\$403) fine, with an additional EGP 10,000 (\$403) fee to suspend the prison sentences.

The management of the 53rd Cairo International Book Fair rejected participation by the Asir al-Kutub publishing house without a justification, according to the firm. The decision followed media allegations that the firm published books and publications authored by Islamists. Company officials told the *Cairo 24* website they had reviewed all their religious heritage publications to ensure that they were free of any ideas that support “religious extremism” and removed a large number of books from its electronic platform. The publishing house River Nile Center for Publishing issued a statement on Facebook six days after the exhibition’s launch announcing the termination of its presence in the book fair. The firm stated authorities provided no reason or documentation to justify their removal from the event.



## **b. Freedoms of Peaceful Assembly and Association**

The government routinely restricted the freedoms of peaceful assembly and association.

### **Freedom of Peaceful Assembly**

The constitution provides for freedom of assembly “according to notification regulated by law.” The demonstrations law includes an expansive list of prohibited activities, authorizing the Ministry of Interior to prohibit or curtail planned demonstrations. Domestic and international human rights organizations asserted the law did not meet international standards regarding freedom of assembly. A government-imposed exclusion zone prohibits protests within 2,600 feet (790 meters) of vital governmental institutions.

The Prison Regulation Law prevents the conditional release of those convicted of crimes relating to freedom of assembly, among other crimes.

In most cases, the government rigorously enforced the law restricting demonstrations, in some instances using force, including in cases of small groups of peaceful protesters. In January security forces arrested nine protesters following a 70-person, peaceful demonstration demanding the rebuilding of a church in Minya Governorate. According to rights reports, the defendants faced charges of participating in an assembly that endangers public peace and committing a terrorist act with the aim of disturbing public security. The defendants were released from pretrial detention in April, but their criminal charges remained pending at year’s end.

According to a local human rights organization, thousands of persons whom authorities arrested in 2013 and 2014 for participating in demonstrations (some peaceful) remained imprisoned; however, authorities released others who had completed their sentences or received a pardon. Authorities reportedly held such individuals under charges of attending an unauthorized protest, incitement to violence, or blocking roads. Human rights groups claimed authorities inflated or used these charges solely to target individuals suspected of being members of groups opposed to the government or those who sought to exercise the rights to freedom of assembly or association.

## **Freedom of Association**

The constitution provides for freedom of association; however, the law governing associations and government practices significantly restrict this right.

A 2019 law governing NGOs eliminated prison sentences as penalties and removed formal oversight roles for security and intelligence authorities. Executive regulations clarifying the law in 2021 stated that NGOs would have exclusive access to and control of NGO funds as well as procedural protections, such as impartial administrative and judicial appeal mechanisms. The 2019 law stipulates that NGOs are established through notification; however, the executive regulations require NGOs to provide extensive data to register with authorities, including information on founders and planned activities. All NGOs must receive the approval of the Ministry of Social Solidarity to register, receive funding, or conduct activities. Further, international NGOs are required to receive approval from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to register to operate.

In April the president ratified a legislative amendment to the NGO law extending the previous deadline for organizations to register with the government until October. The deadline was extended a second time in October until April 2023. In August a group of leading human rights defenders called for review of the NGO registration law and associated administrative decisions through the National Dialogue (see 1.e.).

In a January 9 statement, ANHRI announced it would suspend its activities as an organization in advance of the NGO law's registration deadline, although ANHRI lawyers would continue to work as individual defenders and advocates for human rights. ANHRI alleged that it faced harassment, physical assaults, arrests, and threats from security services seeking to recruit staff members to become informants, and the group had no choice but to suspend its operations "given the increasing disregard for the rule of law in Egypt" and authorities' targeting of independent human rights organizations.

The penal code criminalizes the request for or acceptance of foreign funds, materiel, weapons, ammunition, or "other things" by any individual or group from states or local or international nongovernmental organizations "with the intent to

harm the national interest.” Those convicted may be sentenced to life in prison (or the death penalty in the case of public officials) for crimes committed during times of war or with “terrorist purpose.”

In a July statement, eight rights groups accused the government of employing a wide range of practices to suppress the human rights movement. In addition to Case 173 (see section 2.d.), they accused state security-owned or -aligned outlets of running media smear campaigns against human rights defenders. They also accused officials of summoning human rights organizations’ staff to state security headquarters for questioning and arresting and prosecuting human rights defenders on the basis of false terrorism charges.

On July 28, the Court of Cassation upheld the life sentences of Muslim Brotherhood supreme guide Mohamed Badie, his deputy Khairat el-Shater, and six others who were convicted in 2019 on charges of collaborating with Hamas.

### **c. Freedom of Religion**

See the Department of State’s *International Religious Freedom Report* at <https://www.state.gov/religiousfreedomreport/>.

### **d. Freedom of Movement and the Right to Leave the Country**

The law provides for freedom of internal movement, foreign travel, emigration, and repatriation, and the government generally respected these rights, albeit with some exceptions, including the treatment of potential refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities imposed travel bans that limited the right to leave the country for individuals under open-ended criminal cases, including a number of human rights defenders and academic researchers.

**In-country Movement:** Citizens and foreigners may not travel in areas of the country designated as military zones. The government sought to prevent private individuals, journalists, civil society figures, and international organizations from entering North Sinai on safety grounds, which the government stated were necessary restrictions in response to long-running counterterrorism operations. According to local human rights organizations, security forces set up checkpoints in downtown Cairo and other locations around the anniversaries of street protests

and conducted searches and arrests without warrants.

**Foreign Travel:** The constitution states that “no citizen may be prevented from leaving the State territory,” but men who have not completed compulsory military service or obtained an exemption may not travel abroad or emigrate, and authorities also imposed travel bans on human rights defenders, activists, journalists, lawyers, and other civil society figures.

Authorities required citizens between ages 18 and 40 to obtain permission from the Interior Ministry before traveling to 16 countries (Georgia, Guinea, Indonesia, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Malaysia, Qatar, South Africa, South Korea, Sudan, Syria, Thailand, Turkey, Yemen), but enforcement was sporadic.

The government imposed travel bans on some human rights defenders and political activists who were under investigation or had been formally charged. Local human rights groups maintained that authorities used travel bans to intimidate and silence human rights defenders, and documented cases in which the bans continued after the conclusion of other legal processes. A 2018 court ruling stated a travel ban “does not require the investigation of certain facts and their certainty,” but there must be “serious evidence that there are reasons for it and that the decision to prevent travel is due to security reasons and the interests of the state.” In July HRW released a report detailing the impacts of travel bans on civil society, describing the practice as “arbitrary” and “life altering” by preventing travel for work, studies, and family reunification. HRW noted that the bans were not formally announced and that those affected had no clear legal avenue to challenge them. Travel bans separated human rights defenders from family members residing abroad. Individuals facing travel bans and asset freezes reported the open-ended nature of the bans created financial, employment, and legal difficulties.

In July a group of eight local and international organizations called on the government to close Case 173, known as the “Foreign Funding Case.” According to the groups, 22 human rights defenders continued to face a travel ban for their work, including 17 from case 173.

In May the Middle East Studies Association’s committee on academic freedom called on the government to lift the travel ban on Waleed Salem, a Ph.D. candidate

at the University of Washington. Local and international organizations advocating for Salem called on the Court of Appeal to revoke the public prosecutor's decision to impose the travel ban. A petition to the public prosecutor to lift the ban was rejected in February, according to reports. Officials had stopped Salem from traveling in May 2021 despite prior confirmation by his lawyer that he did not face any restrictions. According to the organization's statement, the public prosecutor issued a decision imposing a travel ban the day before his intended travel without a legal justification or a specified duration for the ban. Salem was again prevented from traveling in November, and the travel ban remained in place at year's end. Salem was arrested in May 2018 and detained for almost six months on charges of "spreading false news" and joining a terrorist organization. He was released with precautionary measures in December 2018, which were later lifted in 2020.

Several prominent human rights defenders, including Azza Soliman and Negad al-Borai, announced their travel bans had been lifted during the year.

A prominent human rights attorney said several persons affiliated with the NGO Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, including Hossam Bahgat, Gasser Abdel Razek, and Karim Ennarah, remained prohibited from traveling and accessing their personal assets. The lawyer added the well-known human rights lawyers Nasser Amin and Hoda Abdel Wahab also had been banned from traveling.

Ahmed Samir Santawy, who received a presidential pardon in July, was prevented from boarding a flight on August 27 to return to Austria to continue his studies. Authorities had assured Santawy there was no impediment to his traveling prior to his attempted departure, according to public statements. In 2021 Santawy had been sentenced to four years in prison for joining a terrorist group and publishing "false news," a ruling condemned by local and international rights organizations. Human rights groups also alleged Santawy and former member of parliament Ziyad el-Aleimy were physically abused while in detention.

## **e. Protection of Refugees**

The government cooperated with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and other humanitarian organizations in providing protection and assistance to refugees, returning refugees, or asylum seekers, as well as other

persons of concern. Access to registered and unregistered refugees and asylum seekers in detention remained a problem.

**Access to Asylum:** The constitution provides for the protection of political refugees, but the law does not provide for granting asylum or refugee status, and the government has not established a comprehensive legal regime for providing protection to refugees. The government granted UNHCR authority to make refugee status determinations. UNHCR does not register or assist Libyan citizens or Palestinian refugees in the country.

Reports of irregular movements of individuals, including asylum seekers, and detention of foreign nationals attempting to depart the country irregularly via the Mediterranean by boat, had almost stopped, according to UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), following enactment and enforcement of a law dramatically increasing patrols on the country's Mediterranean coast in 2016. The IOM noted increased migrant flows from Egypt into Libya, citing as many as 10,000 Egyptian and other nationals crossing per month, including unaccompanied minors.

UNHCR did not have access to detention centers and border areas, absent prior approval by authorities. Local rights groups faced continued resistance from the government when trying to interview detainees at Qanater men's and women's prisons outside Cairo, which confined most detained refugees and asylum seekers. Authorities generally released asylum seekers registered with UNHCR but frequently did not release detained migrants, many of whom were Eritrean, Ethiopian, Somali, and Sudanese, who may have had a basis for asylum claims. Authorities often held detained migrants as unregistered asylum seekers in police stations and sometimes sent them to regular prisons alongside convicted criminals or deported them.

The government did not recognize UNHCR's mandate to offer services to Palestinians outside of the fields of operations of the UN Relief and Works Agency, reportedly due to its belief that allowing UNHCR registration would negate Palestinian refugees' right of return. Approximately 3,000 Palestinian refugees from Syria also were present in the country, mostly in Cairo. The Palestinian Authority mission in the country provided limited assistance to this

population. The Swiss Red Cross also provided some humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees from Syria.

**Refoulement:** Authorities reportedly sometimes encouraged unregistered detainees to return to their countries of origin or a neighboring country to avoid continued detention, even in cases where the individuals expressed a fear of return.

In April a group of UN experts issued a statement condemning the expulsion of Eritrean asylum seekers and calling on the government to halt any further forced returns. According to the statement, at least 68 Eritrean nationals were returned between October 2021 and April 2022 without assessing the risks they may face.

UNHCR confirmed 2,998 detentions through September, a 14 percent increase from the previous year. Seventy-six percent of detainees were unregistered migrants and 24 percent were refugees registered with UNHCR. For the same period, UNHCR verified 109 deportees, only four of whom were registered. The majority of deportees were Eritrean. Other nationalities included South Sudanese, Ethiopians, Syrians, and one Yemeni. In February UNHCR reported 15 unregistered South Sudanese asylum seekers were in detention and at risk of deportation, including children. The UN agency reportedly requested access to the detainees on February 17, but no updates were made available by year's end.

In June a local rights group representing Yemeni asylum seeker Abdul-Baqi Saeed Abdo warned of his possible forced deportation. Saeed Abdo was arrested in December 2021 and remained in pretrial detention facing charges of joining a terrorist group and contempt of the Islamic religion, according to the rights group's statement. The group stated Saeed Abdo sought asylum in Egypt and obtained a registration card from UNHCR after being assaulted in Yemen following his conversion to Christianity. Saeed Abdo remained in detention at year's end.

**Abuse of Migrants and Refugees:** Media, NGOs, and UNHCR staff reported multiple cases of attacks against refugees, particularly women and children. According to UNHCR, refugees sometimes reported sexual and other harassment and discrimination. Refugee women and girls, particularly Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans, faced the greatest risk of sexual and gender-based violence.

In March HRW reported police arrested 30 Sudanese refugees and asylum seekers,

including some local Sudanese activists who previously organized protests in Cairo, and subjected some to forced labor and physical abuse. The Ministry of Interior denied the accusations.

According to press reports, police continued security sweeps in neighborhoods known to house refugees and migrants, resulting in increased detentions on the basis of irregular status. Detainees at times reported authorities subjected them to verbal abuse and poor detention conditions.

The IOM estimated that approximately 1.1 million migrants lived in vulnerable situations. A significant number of the migrants were from Sudan and South Sudan, where conflicts continued to displace tens of thousands of persons annually. Migrants reported incidents of racial insults and sexual harassment due to their skin color.

**Employment:** No law grants or prohibits refugees the right to work. Those seeking employment were hampered by broader deteriorating economic conditions and societal discrimination, particularly against Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans. Refugees who found work often took low-paying jobs in the informal market, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to financial and sexual exploitation by employers.

**Access to Basic Services:** The law gives migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers similar access to the national education and health systems as citizens. A UN report, written in cooperation with the government, acknowledged that the law was not uniformly applied, and many vulnerable migrants and refugees relied on support from UN agencies to get medical care.

Refugees, in particular non-Arabic-speaking refugees from Sudan and the rest of sub-Saharan Africa, faced barriers to accessing some services, including health care and public education. The Ministry of Interior restricted access for some international organizations seeking to assist migrants and refugees in Sinai, citing the conflict in the region. UNHCR provided some refugees with modest support for education and health care, as well as small monthly financial assistance grants for particularly vulnerable refugees. The IOM provided additional assistance to particularly vulnerable migrants and individual asylum cases that were either



rejected or being processed by UNHCR.

Non-Arabic-speaking refugees faced greater barriers in accessing some services, including health and public education, according to multiple advocacy groups. Despite access to national education, some Sudanese, South Sudanese, Yemeni, and Syrian refugees opted for community-based learning centers, due to challenges related to lack of identification documents, harassment, and limited capacity of public schools. Refugee children not enrolled in public schools mainly attended refugee-run schools or private schools, or they were home schooled.

The law requires government hospitals to provide free emergency medical care to refugees, but many hospitals could not do so. According to a UN report, migrants cited prohibitive costs and discrimination as among the primary reasons for their lack of access to health care. In some cases, hospitals reportedly insisted that refugees provide payment in advance of receiving services or refused to provide services to refugees. One local refugee agency reported some refugees died due to the lack of medical care.

## **f. Status and Treatment of Internally Displaced Persons**

Not applicable

## **g. Stateless Persons**

There are five documented cases of stateless persons, originally from Armenia, who had been displaced for more than 50 years, but a local civil society organization indicated the number of stateless persons in the country was likely higher. The government and UNHCR lacked a mechanism for identifying stateless persons, including those of disputed Sudanese/South Sudanese nationality and those of disputed Ethiopian/Eritrean nationality. A majority of the approximately 70,000 Palestinian refugees were stateless but lacking recognition of their status.

Media reported some Bedouins in Sinai remained stateless after Israel handed the Sinai back to the country in 1982, and others remained stateless in disputed border areas with Sudan.

## **Section 3. Freedom to Participate in the Political Process**

The constitution states that citizens have the ability to choose their government in free and fair periodic elections held by secret ballot and based on universal and equal suffrage, but significant constraints on freedom of expression, association, and assembly limited citizens' ability to do so.

### **Elections and Political Participation**

**Recent Elections:** Presidential elections were held in 2018. Challengers to incumbent President Sisi withdrew ahead of the election, citing personal decisions, political pressure, legal troubles, and unfair competition; some were arrested for alleged abuses of candidacy rules. Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations on freedoms of association, peaceful assembly, and expression severely constrained broad participation in the political process. There were two rounds of elections in 2020 for the 200 elected seats in the reestablished 300-seat upper house, called the Senate, and for the 568 elected seats of the House of Representatives. A progovernment coalition won an overwhelming majority of the Senate's 200 elected seats; the president appointed the remaining 100 seats. Election observers documented visible judicial supervision, a tight security presence, and COVID-19 precautions in place. Local media noted higher than expected participation by women and youth voters. One political coalition alleged instances of vote rigging and bribery that advantaged an opponent political party during the House of Representatives' elections. Some opposition parties questioned the official figures for youth turnout, especially in poorer areas, and claimed young persons were bussed in to vote. No significant acts of violence or disturbances to the election processes were observed.

Domestic and international organizations expressed concern that government limitations and restrictions on freedoms of speech, association, and assembly severely constrained citizens' participation in the political process. In May a petition signed by 60 public figures, including politicians and human rights activists, called on the government to take steps to build confidence between the government and the political opposition and civil society to address these concerns ahead of the National Dialogue (see section 1.e.).

**Political Parties and Political Participation:** The constitution grants citizens the ability to form, register, and operate political parties. The law requires new parties to have a minimum of 5,000 members from each of at least 10 governorates. The constitution also states that political activity may not be practiced nor a political party formed on the basis of religion or discrimination based on gender or origin. No activity that is “hostile to democratic principles, secretive, or of military or quasi-military nature may be practiced.” Political parties may not be dissolved except by a court judgment. Rights groups asserted that existing electoral practices contravened these provisions.

The Freedom and Justice Party, the political wing of the banned Muslim Brotherhood, and the Islamist Building and Development Party remained banned. Authorities did not ban other Islamist parties, including the Strong Egypt Party.

In February activist Haitham al-Banna, a member of the opposition Constitution Party founded by former Nobel Laureate Mohamed al-Baradei, faced accusations of joining a terrorist group, deliberately “spreading false news,” and misusing social media. According to rights groups, al-Banna was interrogated regarding social media posts he made commemorating the January 25 Revolution that toppled President Mubarak in 2011. The SSSP ordered al-Banna’s release in April.

The government does not broadcast or publish parliamentary sessions in the House of Representatives or Senate. In May 2021 a local human rights organization filed a lawsuit challenging this as violating the constitution’s provisions on holding parliamentary sessions in public. A verdict in the lawsuit remained pending at year’s end.

**Participation of Women and Members of Minority Groups:** No laws limit participation of women or members of minority groups in the political process. Social and cultural barriers, however, limited women’s political participation and leadership in most political parties and some government institutions.

In July the opposition Constitution Party elected Gameela Ismail, a woman, as its new head. Six women led cabinet ministries, including one Christian woman, and two women served as deputy ministers. There were two Christians (in Ismailia and Damietta Governorates) among the appointed governors of the 27 governorates. In

2018 authorities appointed Manal Awad Michael, a Christian woman, governor of Damietta. In July Major General Manal Atef was appointed Director of the General Department of Human Rights. This is the most senior position held by a female officer within the Ministry of Interior. President Sisi continued appointing female judges to the State Council, adding 39 new assistant and deputy counselors in June, bring the total to 137 since October 2021. Prior to that time, no women served on the State Council, the judicial authority overseeing administrative disputes and disciplinary cases involving public authorities. In August, 73 female judges, including two Christians, were appointed to the courts of first instance, and 24 female officials to the Administrative Prosecution Authority. On February 8, President Sisi appointed Bolous Fahmy to head the Supreme Constitutional Court, the first Coptic Christian to hold this position.

## **Section 4. Corruption and Lack of Transparency in Government**

The law provides criminal penalties for corruption by officials, but the government did not consistently implement the law. There were a number of reports of government corruption during the year, sometimes with impunity. Many observers and media reports indicated corruption remained a significant challenge through the public sector.

**Corruption:** Courts returned multiple verdicts against former members of the judiciary who had served under various presidential administrations, high-level officials, and civil servants for misuse of office and bribery.

In March the Giza Criminal Court sentenced seven civil servants to prison terms ranging from five to 15 years on charges of public money embezzlement of EGP 331 million (\$18 million) and illegal profiteering.

On July 27, the Cairo Criminal Court sentenced the former director of the Ministry of Health's Free Treatment Department, Mohamed Abdel-Magid al-Ashhab, to 10 years in prison and fined him EGP 500,000 (\$20,150) on bribery charges.

In August the Court of Appeals received settlement agreements, known as "reconciliations," for the repayment of EGP eight billion (\$417 million) and the

closure of two corruption cases against the late former Minister of Agriculture Youssef Wali, other ministry officials, and local businessmen. The agreements ended the criminal cases against the defendants connected to the seizure of state lands for reclamation projects that were then used to build residential compounds, villas, and palaces.

In August the Port Said Criminal Court issued a sentence of 24 years in prison and a fine of EGP 2.6 million (\$104,780) to a former judge on bribery charges.

## **Section 5. Governmental Posture Towards International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Abuses of Human Rights**

International and local human rights organizations stated the government continued to be uncooperative with their efforts to investigate alleged abuses of human rights.

In September 2021 the government launched a five-year *National Strategy for Human Rights* that included a focus on jobs, health care, clean water, food, and affordable housing, as well as initiatives to enhance civil society and free expression.

Independent domestic human rights NGOs faced difficulties in operating due to reprisals and pressure from the government and security forces throughout the country. State-owned and state-affiliated media at times depicted NGOs, particularly those that received funding from international sources, as undertaking subversive activities (see 2.b.). Extended delays in gaining government approvals and an unclear legal environment continued to limit the ability of both domestic and international NGOs to operate. Authorities sometimes allowed civil society organizations not registered as NGOs to operate, but such organizations reported harassment, along with threats of government interference, investigation, asset freezes, or closure.

**Retribution against Human Rights Defenders (HRDs):** Human rights defenders and political activists were routinely subjected to governmental and societal harassment and intimidation, including through criminal prosecutions, interrogations, asset freezes, and travel bans (see section 2.d.). Some NGOs

reported receiving visits or calls to staff, both at work and at home, from security service officers and tax officials attempting to monitor their activities, as well as other forms of harassment by authorities. There were reports of reprisals against human rights defenders residing outside the country (see section 1.e.).

A report focusing on the targeting of human rights defenders during the first quarter of the year documented violations in five cases. In addition to the arrest and detention of Youssef Mansour (see section 1.d.) and the closure of ANHRI due to various pressures from authorities (see section 2.b.), the report noted the detention of lawyer Osama Abdel Hakim Bayoumi, the “recycling” of charges against lawyer Ahmed al-Fahlawi, and the lack of medical care for imprisoned lawyer Hoda Abdel Moneim. According to a letter of concern from Lawyers for Lawyers, Bayoumi’s arrest on charges of joining a terrorist group and “spreading false news” followed his work on sensitive cases involving political prisoners and journalists. The letter noted his home was searched without a warrant. He remained in pretrial detention at year’s end.

Online censorship (see section 2.a.) restricted the ability of NGOs, journalists, internet activists, and bloggers to publicize information concerning human rights abuses. The government continued investigations into the receipt of foreign funding by several human rights organizations (see section 2.b.). Human rights groups reported that the continuation of Case 173 (see 2.d.) remained an obstacle to maintaining normal operations, including fundraising, and cast a shadow over their work due to fears of potential criminal prosecution, asset freezes, and travel bans as the result of lawful actions by organization staff. Major international human rights organizations, such as HRW and Amnesty International, had not maintained offices in the country since 2014 due to security restrictions and lawsuits targeting their presence in the country.

**The United Nations or Other International Bodies:** Authorities did not allow the International Committee of the Red Cross access to prisoners and detainees. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) renewed its request to open an office in Cairo during an official visit to the NCHR on July 24. The OHCHR had sought to open an office in Egypt since the 1990s, according to a local human rights lawyer.

In July rights groups renewed their calls for the release of Ibrahim Metwally Hegazy, a human rights lawyer who had worked with the United Nations. According to a statement from local and international NGOs, Metwally had been illegally deprived of his freedom without due process, under continued pretrial detention for nearly half a decade, simply due to his cooperation with UN mechanisms. The human rights lawyer and founder of the Association of the Families of the Disappeared was arrested in 2017 at the Cairo International Airport while attempting to travel to Geneva for a meeting of the UN Working Group on Enforced or Involuntary Disappearances.

**Government Human Rights Bodies:** The NCHR, which was reconstituted in 2021, was the leading body addressing human rights. By law the NCHR is an independent council responsible for promoting, developing, and protecting human rights and public freedoms in accordance with the constitution and ratified international agreements. The House of Representatives selects its 27 members from among public figures known for advancing human rights, and the president ratifies the selections. In April the NCHR announced the completion of a digitization project for submitting complaints regarding human rights violations.

President Sisi announced the reactivation of the PPC in April and called for a national dialogue to address political, social, and economic problems, including human rights (see section 1.e.). The PPC makes recommendations for pardons of prisoners and release of pretrial detainees, which are referred to the office of the president and the public prosecutor make the final decisions. Civil society organizations stated they submitted lists of thousands of prisoners and detainees to the PPC for consideration. PPC members claimed that by year's end, more than 1,000 individuals were released as a result of their work, while some independent rights groups put the number closer to 850. According to some NGOs, the vast majority of releases were of individuals held in pretrial detention, while only a small number of convicted individuals received pardons.

The government appointed a board of trustees to oversee the planning for the national dialogue, but the dialogue had not started as of year's end.

Other government human rights bodies included the Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights; the National Council for Women (NCW); the National Council

for Persons with Disabilities; the National Coordination Committee for Combating and Preventing Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons; the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood; Justice Ministry's General Department of Human Rights; Prosecutor General Human Rights Office; State Information Service's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Foreign Affairs' Human Rights and International, Social, and Humanitarian Department; Ministry of Local Development's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Social Solidarity's Human Rights Unit; Ministry of Planning and Economic Development's Human Rights Unit; Awqaf Ministry's Human Rights Unit; and human rights units in each of the country's governorates.

In December the intragovernmental Supreme Standing Committee for Human Rights released an assessment of the first year of implementation of the government's September 2021 *National Strategy for Human Rights*, citing as achievements the abolition of the State of Emergency, the call for a comprehensive national political dialogue, the reactivation of the Presidential Pardon Committee, and the appointment of women to judicial positions in the State Council and Public Prosecutions Office for the first time. Local and international rights groups criticized the strategy and the assessment as exaggerating the government's human rights efforts for international audiences without making substantive improvements to the human rights situation on the ground.

## **Section 6. Discrimination and Societal Abuses**

### **Women**

**Rape and Domestic Violence:** The law criminalizes rape, prescribing penalties of 15 to 25 years' imprisonment, or life imprisonment for cases of rape involving armed abduction. Spousal rape is not specifically designated as an illegal act. Civil society organizations reported instances of police pressuring rape and domestic violence survivors not to pursue charges. An NCW study found that approximately 1.5 million women reported domestic violence each year.

In February actor Shady Khalaf was sentenced to three years in prison for sexual assault and harassment of seven women who participated in acting workshops he gave in Cairo (see section 2.a.).



Domestic violence was a significant problem. The law does not specifically prohibit domestic violence or spousal abuse, but authorities may apply provisions relating to assault with accompanying penalties. The law requires that an assault survivor produce multiple eyewitnesses, often difficult for domestic abuse survivors. Police often treated domestic violence as a matter for private family resolution and declined to pursue criminal charges.

In February social media and women's rights advocates railed against television host Amr Adeeb for repeating the 2019 statement by Grand Imam of al-Azhar Ahmed al-Tayeb in which he declared, "Beating the wife is not obligatory, but it is permissible." Commentators decried Adeeb's failure to use his platform to unequivocally condemn domestic violence, with social media users and women's rights activists sharing examples of gender-based violence and lambasting perceived ambivalence to this public health issue. In response to the outcry, al-Azhar's Jurisprudence Research Committee of the Islamic Research Academy issued a supplemental statement on domestic violence, saying the institution does not oppose legislation that criminalizes domestic violence and "stresses that Islam generally refuses violence unless in very specific cases." The statement added that "the authorities" have the right to criminalize what is accepted in Islam based on the circumstances.

The Interior Ministry includes a unit responsible for combating sexual and gender-based violence. The NCW was responsible for coordinating government and civil society efforts to empower women. In 2021 Prime Minister Moustafa Madbouly issued a decree to establish the country's first integrated governorate-level units to coordinate and improve integrated survivor-centered services to women.

**Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C):** FGM/C is illegal and remained a serious problem, even though recent data indicated a decrease in the rates of young girls subjected to the practice.

According to UN data provided in February by the Ministry of Social Solidarity, an estimated 52 percent of girls ages 13-17 had been subjected to FGM/C, compared to 90 percent of their mothers. The ministry credited the decrease to government efforts to raise awareness on the dangers of FGM/C. A decrease was also documented in the results of the 2021 *Egyptian Family Health Issues Survey*

by the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) in September. The survey found an overall drop in the FGM/C rate to 86 percent, compared with 92 percent in the previous study in 2014. The survey's data showed the rate among young women and girls ages 0-19 dropped to 14 percent, down from 21 percent in 2014. CAPMAS also highlighted a decrease in the rate of women who wanted FGM/C for their children to 27 percent from 56 percent in the previous survey.

According to international and local observers, the government took steps to enforce the FGM/C law. In 2021 President Sisi ratified amendments to the penal code that increase FGM/C minimum sentences from one to 15 years to five to 20 years in prison, removed the “medical exception” in the law, introduced bans for medical providers and medical institutions from providing medical services for a period after involvement in the crime, and extended criminal liability to anyone supporting the crime, including family members of the survivor. The government enlisted support from religious leaders to combat cultural acceptance of FGM/C.

On January 30, the National Council for Childhood and Motherhood announced it had prevented an attempt by a midwife to perform FGM/C on five girls ages 10-15 in the village of Bani Rafea, Assiut Governorate. According to local press, police questioned the midwife, seized medical tools from her house, and summoned the girls' parents for further questioning.

In February the Aswan Criminal Court sentenced a 19-year-old student to three years in prison for performing FGM/C on an eight-year-old girl; the child's grandfather was sentenced in absentia to three years in prison as the person responsible for soliciting the procedure. In December a Qena criminal court sentenced a married couple to three years in prison for performing FGM/C on their daughter.

**Other Forms of Gender-based Violence:** The law allows leniency towards men who kill their wives upon discovering them in an act of adultery. The law does not specifically address “honor” crimes, which authorities treated as any other crime.

In its annual report issued in February, the Observatory of Gender-Based Violence against Women recorded 813 cases of violence against women and girls in 2021,

compared with 415 violent crimes in 2020. The report included data from incidents of murder, sexual assault, sexual harassment, rape, and domestic violence.

Two separate but similar killings of female university students sparked outrage and calls for legal reform and protections. Both incidents were caught on video and generated significant social media attention, including comments condemning the survivors and sympathizing with the perpetrators. In June a fellow student killed Naira Ashraf, a student at Mansoura University, outside the university's gate after she refused his marriage proposal, according to media reports. The criminal court sentenced the confessed killer to death and requested the execution be televised to serve as a deterrent to those who might contemplate similar violent actions. The parliament had not addressed the request to broadcast the execution as of year's end. On August 9, a student stabbed to death Salma Bahgat in Sharqia, after she and her family rejected his marriage proposal. In November the court upheld the death penalty for the murderer.

On August 10, the day after Bahgat's killing, a group of 21 women's rights organizations called for a new law to combat gender-based violence. In their statement, the groups stated the culture of violence against women was fueled by "societal complicity that justifies it," and they demanded action on a new law as part of the implementation of the *National Strategy for Human Rights*.

**Sexual Harassment:** While the government continued to take steps to prevent sexual harassment, it remained a serious problem. Amendments to the penal code ratified on August 18 upgraded sexual harassment to a felony offense, increased minimum sentences to two to seven years in prison (up from six months to five years), increased minimum fines, and added a provision that repeat offenders may face double the prison time.

Media and NGOs reported that sexual harassment by police was a problem, and that the potential for further harassment and victim blaming, lengthy legal procedures, and lack of survivor protections further discouraged women from filing complaints.

On January 12, the Court of Cassation upheld the verdict against activist Amal

Fathy for “spreading false news” and publishing material that insults public decency, while reducing her prison sentence from two years to one. The charges stemmed from a Facebook post in 2018 in which she spoke about being sexually harassed by a public bank employee and criticized the government’s lack of action to address these matters.

In September police arrested an employee of the Helwan police department for releasing intimate videos of a woman who rejected his marriage proposal in what local media described as a “revenge porn” case. According to media reports, the man admitted to attempting to defame the woman and her family after a member of the family reportedly assaulted him.

**Reproductive Rights:** There were no reports of coerced abortion or involuntary sterilization on the part of government authorities.

In September the deputy health minister stated that lack of awareness, poverty, physical isolation, and a lack of female doctors in rural areas served as obstacles for 2.6 million women who wanted to delay pregnancies. President Sisi encouraged citizens to choose to have smaller families in public statements. According to statements by government officials in September, the government offered family planning methods for free or at lowered prices as part of initiatives to slow the rate of population growth. According to CAPMAS statistics from the national health survey, the fertility rate declined by 20 percent to 2.8 births per woman in 2021, from 3.5 in 2014.

Gender norms and social, cultural, economic, and religious barriers inhibited some women’s ability to make reproductive decisions and to access contraceptives. Some women lacked access to information on reproductive health, and the limited availability of women health-care providers reduced access to skilled health attendance during pregnancy and childbirth, in view of the preference many women had for women health-care providers based on social and religious reasons.

There was limited information on government assistance to survivors of sexual assault, including whether emergency contraception was available as part of clinical management of rape.

**Discrimination:** The constitution provides for equal rights for male and female

citizens. While the government continued to take steps to improve their situation, women did not enjoy the same legal rights and opportunities as men, and discrimination was widespread. Aspects of the law and traditional societal practices disadvantaged women in family, social, and economic life.

Women faced widespread societal discrimination, threats to their physical security, and workplace bias in favor of men, thus hindering women's social and economic advancement.

Laws affecting marriage and personal status generally corresponded to an individual's religious group. A female Muslim citizen cannot legally marry a non-Muslim man. If she were to do so, authorities charge her with adultery and, under the government's interpretation of Islamic law, place any children from such a marriage in the custody of a male Muslim guardian. *Khula* (divorce) allows a Muslim woman to obtain a divorce without her husband's consent, provided she forgoes all her financial rights, including alimony, dowry, and other benefits. The Coptic Orthodox Church permits divorce only in rare circumstances, such as adultery or conversion of one spouse to another religion. Other Christian churches permitted divorce on a case-by-case basis.

In June the minister of justice appointed a committee of 10 judges, including two women, to draft a new personal status law for Muslims. The committee's membership was largely drawn from family court judges, according to local media. There was no parallel effort announced to review the personal status law for Christians. The law follows sharia in matters of inheritance; therefore, a Muslim female heir generally receives one-half the amount of a male heir's inheritance, and Christian widows of Muslim men have no inheritance rights. A sole Muslim female heir receives one-half her parents' estate, and the balance goes to the siblings of the parents or the children of the siblings if the siblings are deceased. A sole male heir inherits his parents' entire estate.

In marriage and divorce cases, a woman's testimony must be judged credible to be admissible. Usually, the woman accomplishes credibility by conveying her testimony through an adult male relative or representative. The law assumes a man's testimony is credible unless proven otherwise.

In February the country's Islamic authority, al-Azhar, issued a 14-point graphic condemning domestic violence, forced marriage, underage marriage, FGM/C, and arbitrary divorce, and supporting women's travel, economic, inheritance, and equal employment rights. Among the messages presented were that violence against women, sexual harassment, and forced marriage were religiously forbidden, and that FGM/C is not a religious action. The release of the infographic followed the suggestion by a prominent television presenter that it was permissible for a man to beat his wife under the principles of Islam (see Rape and Domestic Violence, above).

In January the Public Prosecutor's Office and the State Council announced that women would be allowed for the first time to apply to be assistant prosecutors and counselors in the respective judicial authorities. Previously, women had only been appointed as judges by presidential decree. In March, 98 female judges of the State Council were sworn in to hear cases before the administrative court. In June, 39 additional female judges joined the State Council, bringing the total to 137.

## **Systemic Racial or Ethnic Violence and Discrimination**

The constitution states all citizens "are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason." It does not specify age, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV-positive or other communicable disease status. The main groups facing racial or ethnic violence and discrimination included Nubians and Bedouins. In August the Minority Rights Group released a report indicating that minority communities concentrated on the country's borders, including Nubians, Bedouins, and Amazigh, suffered from inadequate access to health care. According to the report, the centralized nature of health-care facilities and services in urban centers resulted in neglect for marginalized communities.

In June the Refugee Platform in Egypt observed an increase in hate speech directed against migrants and refugees as the hashtag #EnoughRefugeesInEgypt trended. Under this tag, there were calls to expel refugees, claiming they posed a threat to the country and burdened the state's economy.

## Children

**Birth Registration:** Children can derive citizenship through either parent. The government attempted to register all births soon after delivery, but some citizens in remote and tribal areas such as the Sinai Peninsula registered births late or could not document their citizenship. In some cases, failure to register resulted in denial of public services, particularly in urban areas where most services required presentation of a national identification card.

**Education:** Education is compulsory, free, and universal until the ninth grade. The law provides this benefit to stateless persons and refugees. Public schools enrolled Syrian, Yemeni, Sudanese, and South Sudanese refugees. Refugees of other nationalities often chose not to attend public schools because of administrative barriers, discrimination, bullying, and preferences for English-language instruction or for other curricula.

Critics observed overcrowding in classrooms led to students' dependence on additional tutoring sessions, which were prohibitively expensive for those with limited economic resources, to score adequately on national exams.

**Child Abuse:** The constitution stipulates the government shall protect children from all forms of violence, abuse, mistreatment, and commercial and sexual exploitation. According to a local rights group, authorities recorded hundreds of cases of alleged child abuse each month. The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood, which operated a telephone hotline, worked on child abuse matters, and several civil society organizations assisted runaway and abandoned children.

**Child, Early, and Forced Marriage:** The legal age of marriage is 18. A government study published in 2020 reported that 2.5 percent of the population in Upper Egypt governorates were married between the ages of 15 and 17, with higher rates among girls than boys. Informal marriages unrecognized under the law could lead to contested paternity and leave female minors without alimony and other claims available to women with registered marriages.

Families reportedly sometimes forced adolescent girls to marry wealthy foreign men in what were known locally as “tourism” or “summer” marriages for the purpose of sexual exploitation, prostitution, or forced labor. A law requires a

foreign man who wants to marry an Egyptian woman more than 25 years younger than him must pay the woman EGP 50,000 (\$2,015). Women's rights organizations argued that allowing foreign men to pay a fine to marry much younger women represented a form of trafficking and encouragement of child or forced marriage. They called on the government to eliminate the system.

On April 12, the Council of Ministers approved a draft law criminalizing marriage in which either party is younger than 18. The bill imposes prison sentences of no less than one year and a fine ranging from EGP 50,000 (\$2,015) to EGP 200,000 (\$8,060) for those convicted of facilitating marriage contracts for minors.

In March the Cairo-based Forum for Development and Human Rights Dialogue issued a report on the occasional role of religious authorities in promoting child marriage by conducting religious ceremonies but not officially registering the marriage. The report alleged that members of clergy, particularly in rural areas, frequently agreed to register marriage contracts for girls ages 13 to 17 and estimated that 117,000 underage girls married annually, while cautioning the actual figure could be higher due to underreporting.

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood and governorate child protection units identified attempted child marriages. In May the council announced the prevention of 23 cases of child marriage in several governorates during Eid al-Fitr, in cooperation with the Prosecutor General's Office, the Ministry of Interior, and provincial child protection committees, by providing awareness and family guidance to the girls' families regarding the risks and harms of child marriage. The statement declared these families signed pledges not to complete marriages before the girls reached the legal age.

In July the Ministry of Social Solidarity initiated the "Marriage before 18 Loses Her Rights" campaign to raise awareness about the consequences of child marriages. According to a ministry statement on Facebook, the campaign defended the rights of children in health and education as well as the right to make important life decisions once they reach a legal age. The statement described child marriage as an assault on human dignity and a crime that effects the physical and psychological health of the child and the entire family.



**Sexual Exploitation of Children:** The law provides for sentences of not less than five years' imprisonment and fines for conviction of commercial sexual exploitation of children and child pornography. The government did not adequately enforce the law. The minimum age for consensual sex is 18.

On April 6, the Minya Criminal Court sentenced a defendant to 15 years in prison for threatening a girl by publishing explicit pictures of her on WhatsApp. The ruling established a judicial principle that giving obscene photographs to someone, even with her consent, does not prevent felony extortion charges or other charges related to the publication of explicit material.

In May a criminal court in Tanta sentenced three men to 15 years in prison, and two others to five years in prison, for blackmailing a minor with photoshopped explicit images, leading her to commit suicide. The five men were charged with multiple crimes, including blackmailing a minor with explicit images, invasion of privacy, cyber extortion, human trafficking by publishing explicit images with the intent of forcing her to engage in immoral acts, and sexual assault. The incident generated mass outrage on social media after the girl's suicide note went viral.

In May the Cairo Criminal Court convicted businessman Mohamed al-Amin on charges of human trafficking for molesting and threatening seven young girls and sentenced him to three years in prison and a fine of EGP 200,000 (\$10,300). Investigations concluded that the defendant was harboring the victims in a home he established for orphans, abusing his authority over them to sexually abuse the victims, and intimidating them with threats of beating and expulsion if they reported him, according to media reports.

**Displaced Children:** There were no official statistics on the number of children in street situations. Past UN and academic estimates ranged from 300,000 to three million children, depending on the source and time period of the estimates. The ministry offered shelters to those children, but many children chose not to use them, according to local rights groups, and the incidence of violence, prostitution, and drug dealing in these shelters was high. The Ministry of Health and Population provided mobile health clinics staffed by nurses and social workers. The Ministry of Social Solidarity also provided 17 mobile units in 10 governorates that offered emergency services, including food and health care, to these children.

The National Council for Childhood and Motherhood and UN Office on Drugs and Crime implemented targeted interventions to reduce drug abuse by displaced children.

## **Antisemitism**

The country's Jewish community reportedly numbered as few as 10 individuals split between Cairo and Alexandria.

The Ministry of Education announced several public-school syllabus updates during the year to foster "more tolerant content." No hate speech was reported in state-controlled media during the year. Social media remained a relatively open forum for antisemitic content, including for antisemitic tropes and discourse.

In January the first commemoration of International Holocaust Remembrance Day in Egypt took place in Cairo. The event honored the memories of victims of Nazism and recognized Arabs who confronted intolerance and hatred by saving the lives of Jews during World War II, including through a documentary film and program co-organized by the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum.

## **Trafficking in Persons**

See the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **Organ Harvesting**

The government's interagency National Coordinating Committee for Preventing and Combating Illegal Migration and Trafficking in Persons reported the Interior Ministry processed 10 criminal cases for organ trafficking with five convicted defendants and 24 victims during the year.

In a March interview, UK academic Sean Column described Cairo as a regional hub for organ harvesting and trafficking. He described interviews with individuals, particularly from refugee communities, who sold their organs but were threatened by police when they tried to report the situation.

## **Acts of Violence, Criminalization, and Other Abuses Based on**

## **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity or Expression, or Sex Characteristics**

**Criminalization:** While the law does not explicitly criminalize consensual same-sex sexual activity, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI+) persons were arrested and prosecuted on charges including “debauchery,” prostitution, and “violating family values,” for which the law imposes prison sentences of up to 10 years in prison, significant fines, or both. This results in de facto criminalization of same-sex conduct and identity.

According to a local rights group, there were more than 250 reports of such arrests since 2013. Rights groups and activists reported harassment by police, including physical assault and forced payment of bribes to provide information concerning other LGBTQI+ individuals or to avoid arrest. There were reports that authorities used social media, dating websites, and mobile phone apps to entrap persons they suspected of being gay or transgender, a method that LGBTQI+ advocates described as especially effective since public spaces friendly to LGBTQI+ persons largely had been closed in recent years. Rights groups reported that authorities, including the Forensic Medical Authority, conducted forced anal examinations in cases involving “debauchery” charges, which rights groups indicated primarily targeted LGBTQI+ individuals.

According to a March report from NGO ARTICLE 19 and Harvard Law School, authorities used technology to target the LGBTQI+ community. The report found that police used dating applications to entrap and prosecute homosexual persons. Police also made arbitrary arrests in well-known gay areas before searching mobile phones to find “evidence” that could be used in court, according to the report. In the past, LGBTQI+ persons were charged with violating morality laws, but prosecutors increasingly were charging them with cybercrimes requiring lower standards of evidence and carrying higher penalties.

Based on an NGO survey in February of legal actions targeting LGBTQI+ persons, three individuals, including an Eritrean asylum seeker, were sentenced in Cairo to a year in prison for producing “homosexual pornographic materials.” Separately, a man from Alexandria reportedly was entrapped using a dating application and investigated on charges of “debauchery” and “cyber indecency.”

**Violence against LGBTQI+ Persons:** Several incidents of domestic and street violence against LGBTQI+ individuals were reported by local rights groups, including one case during the year in which authorities allegedly facilitated assault against a detained LGBTQI+ person.

**Discrimination:** Al-Azhar International Center for Electronic Fatwas issued a statement on June 9 denouncing the “systematic diabolical plan to normalize the immoral crime of homosexuality in Muslim societies” through entertainment content directed at children. The center claimed the entertainment industry sought to normalize “the immoral crime of homosexuality” in Muslim societies “through systematic satanic plans,” destroying family moral and social values, distorting identity, and tampering with social security and stability. Local actors and commentators objected to what they perceived as an imposition of foreign values from different cultures with the inclusion of homosexual characters in children’s productions, according to media reports. Social media users called for the government to ban Disney content, and censors banned two Disney films due to brief scenes involving gay characters that Disney reportedly declined to delete.

Authorities did not use antidiscrimination laws to protect LGBTQI+ individuals. Legal discrimination and social stigma impeded LGBTQI+ persons from organizing or advocating publicly in defense of their rights. A local rights group reported several cases of discrimination in employment against members of the LGBTQI+ community that forced them into jobs requiring more working hours and less compensation. Several cases were reported of LGBTQI+ persons who were threatened by landlords or neighbors to vacate their homes or risk complaints being filed against them with police. There were no government efforts to address potential discrimination. There were reports of arrests and harassment of LGBTQI+ individuals. Intimidation and the risk of arrest greatly restricted open reporting and contributed to self-censorship. The government has the authority to deport LGBTQI+ foreigners or bar their entry to the country.

**Availability of Legal Gender Recognition:** The Egyptian Medical Syndicate allows for gender-affirming treatment including surgery, with approval by a special committee composed of medical doctors and al-Azhar clergy, according to international media, citing a local LGBTQI+ activist. The committee relied on a fatwa that stipulates gender-affirming treatment must be “medically necessary” and

justified by a “biological,” not a “mental” matter. Thus, according to HRW, the surgery was allowed only for intersex persons, which left transgender individuals to seek treatment from unregulated and often unsafe clinics.

**Involuntary or Coercive Medical or Psychological Practices Specifically Targeting LGBTQI+ Individuals:** According to a local independent media outlet, the Ministry of Education issued a mandate, based on a recommendation from the Ministry of Interior, to integrate the concepts of “sexual education, sexual harassment, and physical violence” into public school curricula with a specific focus on renouncing homosexuality. These curriculum changes were reportedly to be reinforced with posters, pamphlets, and other media highlighting the “dangers of abnormal behaviors” and to feature the participation of school medical providers, psychologists, social workers, and both Muslim and Christian religious educators.

**Restrictions of Freedom of Expression, Association, or Peaceful Assembly:** Legal discrimination and social stigma impeded LGBTQI+ persons from organizing or advocating publicly in defense of their rights. Additionally, there was widespread public support for discrimination against this community. Opinions supporting LGBTQI+ rights cannot be expressed in state-controlled media. LGBTQI+ civil society organizations are not allowed to register officially, and the ability to assemble peacefully was extremely limited due to the government’s restriction of assemblies in general, as well as absence of any governmental protection for the community against violence they might face.

## **Persons with Disabilities**

The constitution states persons with disabilities are equal without discrimination before the law. The law prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in education, employment, health, political activity, rehabilitation, training, and legal protection. December 2021 amendments to the law stipulated a prison sentence of no less than two years, a fine, or both, for bullying persons with disabilities, with prison terms and fines doubled for repeat offenders. In a first-of-its-kind ruling, the Alexandria Economic Court sentenced a young man to three years in prison and fined him EGP 100,000 (\$4,030) in February following his online bullying of Sama Ramy and Mazen Ahmed, who has Down syndrome, after

the couple published pictures online of their wedding ceremony.

Persons with disabilities did not have access on an equal basis with others to education, health services, public buildings, and transportation. The *National Strategy for Human Rights* called for helping persons with disabilities to enjoy all rights under the law and called for increased medical and educational services for persons with disabilities, but no action to implement these had been taken by year's end.

In August the family of detained university student Oqaba Alaa Labib Hashad appealed to prison authorities to allow him to receive a repaired prosthetic limb, without which he could not walk. The UN special rapporteur on human rights defenders issued two statements of concern regarding the continued pretrial detention of Hashad in 2021. The November 2021 statement reported Hashad was arrested in 2019 and allegedly subjected to physical and psychological torture, including being suspended from a ceiling and subjected to electric shocks. The statement declared that a prison investigator reportedly took Hashad's prosthetic leg in January in retaliation for a human rights report his exiled brother had published. The statement added that Hashad was held in solitary confinement without family visits for three months after he complained on March 5 of the lack of his prosthetic leg.

The law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment. Government policy sets a quota for employing 5 percent of workers with disabilities for companies with more than 50 employees. Authorities did not enforce the quota requirement, and companies often had persons with disabilities on their payroll to meet the quota without employing them. Government-operated treatment centers for persons with disabilities, especially children, were of poor quality.

The National Council for People with Disabilities, headed by the prime minister, aimed to promote, develop, and protect the rights of persons with disabilities and their constitutional dignity. In February the government announced it was conducting a specialized national survey to assess the needs of persons with disabilities. Member of Parliament Rasha Ishaq, secretary of the Senate Human Rights Committee, stated the effort was part of the implementation of the *National*

*Strategy for Human Rights.* CAPMAS, in cooperation with the Ministry of Solidarity, conducted the first specialized national survey of persons with disabilities during the year, covering the 27 governorates with a random sample of approximately 118,000 families, representing rural and urban areas in each governorate. The results were pending at year's end.

The government announced that 950,000 persons with disabilities had been enrolled in a smart-card program that facilitates delivery of government services to them. The government held employment forums for persons with disabilities to facilitate job market access, announced that court employees had been trained to provide legal aid to persons with disabilities, and stated that new codes were published to better enforce laws that protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

Persons with disabilities were often blocked from exercising the right to vote because polling stations lacked accessibility to suit their needs. On April 14, Minister of Social Solidarity Nevine al-Qabbag signed a protocol with Acting President of the National Elections Commission Ahmed Abdel-Azim Matar to adopt measures facilitating the participation of persons with special needs in the electoral process.

In March CAPMAS announced the results of a survey of violence against women with disabilities, in cooperation with the NCW. According to the survey of 5,616 women with disabilities who were beneficiaries of a solidarity program, 61 percent of previously married women with disabilities were subjected to violence by both husband and family and approximately 54 percent of women and girls with disabilities were subjected to psychological violence before marriage.

Persons with disabilities rode government-owned mass transit buses without charge, but the buses were not wheelchair accessible. Persons with disabilities received subsidies to purchase household products, wheelchairs, and prosthetic devices. Some children with disabilities attended schools with their nondisabled peers, while others attended segregated schools. Some of the segregated institutions were informal schools run by NGOs. Some parents of children with disabilities complained on social media of teacher assistants' lack of experience.

In February officials opened the first library for the visually impaired in

Alexandria, which featured braille readers for access to the library's materials. In March the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the Differently Abled Initiative to promote via cultural, social, and sports activities the integration of students with disabilities into university life and to emphasize diverse abilities.

Alexandria Governor Mohamed al-Sharif stated in June that Mandara Beach had been allocated exclusively for persons with disabilities, with capacity for 1,000 families per day and free entry. The governor added that another beach was also being prepared for a similar purpose.

## **Other Societal Violence or Discrimination**

Individuals with HIV faced significant social stigma and discrimination in society and the workplace. The health-care system provided anonymous counseling and testing for HIV, free adult and pediatric antiretroviral therapy, and support groups.

## **Section 7. Worker Rights**

### **a. Freedom of Association and the Right to Collective Bargaining**

The constitution provides for freedom of association and the right to “peaceful” strikes. The law provides for the rights of workers to form and join independent unions and bargain collectively but imposes significant restrictions, including prior approval by a general trade union affiliated with the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (Union Federation). The government did not effectively enforce all applicable laws, including prohibitions on antiunion discrimination. Penalties for violations of law protecting freedom of association and the right to strike were less than those under other laws involving denials of civil rights. The law prescribes union elections every four years and imposes a strict hierarchy for union formation consisting of a company-level trade union committee, a profession or industry-level general union, and a national-level union.

The law requires centralized tripartite negotiations that include workers, represented by a union affiliated with the Union Federation, business owners, and the Ministry of Manpower, which oversees and monitors negotiations and agreements. The government seldom followed the requirement for tripartite negotiations in collective disputes, leaving workers to negotiate directly with



employers, frequently after resorting to a strike.

Elections for the 27 general trade unions took place in June. Those representatives then selected a new head of the Union Federation. In the elections, 19 out of 27 candidates ran unopposed, according to media reports. The Center for Trade Union and Workers Services (CTUWS), a local NGO that monitored each phase of the election processes among local unions, criticized the exclusion by the security services of as many as 1,500 candidates. At a June 18 press conference, CTUWS stated these exclusions “hinder workers from having the right to freely choose their representatives.”

In its most recent annual report, CTUWS monitored 8,041 violations of workers’ rights throughout the country during 2021, including arbitrary dismissal, forced resignation, delayed payment of salaries, and the absence of a nursery. CTUWS revealed that many of these violations took place with the government’s knowledge and that 1,629 of these violations were committed by government agencies.

The law prohibits antiunion discrimination and provides for the reinstatement of workers fired for union activity. The CTUWS announced in a March statement that management from the Nile Company for Insulating Materials dismissed 40 workers, including eight representatives of the trade union committee, and suspended work in all departments of the company in violation of the labor law. CTUWS described the action as an attempt to intimidate the company’s workers and called for solidarity with the workers defending their interests and rights.

Seventy-one workers at Universal Electrical Appliances, a home appliance company, filed lawsuits against the company before the Labor Court, protesting their dismissal from the company and alleging it was due to participating in a strike after their salaries were cut off. The company’s decision of dismissal of the workers included the names of 21 members of the independent union. The administration of the company accused the union committee of inciting the workers to strike. In a June 21 statement, the Egyptian Center for Economic and Social Rights called on the Ministries of Manpower and Investment and the parliament’s Manpower Committee to investigate Universal for violating its collective labor agreements. A lawyer with the center stated it received 50

complaints from workers who were arbitrarily dismissed. A group of 20 labor unions criticized the government's lack of response to "illegal" practices at Universal, which they assert contributed to the suicide of four employees in less than two years among the company's 3,000 workers.

The Ministry of Manpower and affiliated directorates did not allow trade unions to adopt bylaws other than those provided in the law. That position, according to local workers' rights organizations, was contrary to the law, which states unions may use the statutory bylaws as guidance to develop their own.

The government occasionally arrested workers who staged strikes or criticized the government, and it rarely reversed arbitrary dismissals. Twelve employees of the Egyptian General Warehouse Company were accused of inciting a strike at Alexandria Port, according to a criminal complaint submitted by the company's chairman. The company registered the complaint, although the company's operations were not interrupted, according to its employees. The accusations followed demonstrations by hundreds of workers in January which resulted in the chairman being unable to enter the company's headquarters. The demonstrations were against reducing the workers' share of the company's profits and annual bonuses to seven months of the value of the basic wage, compared to eight months in the previous year, according to local press reports.

Independent unions continued to face pressure to dissolve. In many cases, the Ministry of Manpower delayed responding to unions' applications for legal status, according to statements to media. In other instances, the Ministry of Manpower refused to legalize proposed unions if a Union Federation-affiliated counterpart existed.

Workers sometimes staged sit-ins on government and private property, often without obtaining the necessary permits. In 2021 the Court of Cassation ruled that prison sentences for organizing protests without permits would apply to protest organizers and participants.

In a March statement, the Campaign to Defend Trade Union Freedoms stated business owners bullied workers and denied them adequate protection in some private-sector sites. The campaign claimed these businesses were taking advantage

of the absence of any punitive deterrent in the labor law, supported by the biased attitudes towards them in the legislation issued in recent years. The statement pointed to suicide, displacement, delays in salaries, and other crises facing workers during the recent period of additional economic pressures. The group stressed recurrent wage tampering required deterrent penalties under the new law and called on labor and other civil society groups to show solidarity to force employers to respect agreements.

## **b. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor**

The constitution states no work may be compulsory except by virtue of a law. The law prohibits and criminalizes all forms of forced or compulsory labor. The government did not effectively enforce the prohibition. The government conducted awareness-raising activities for migrant laborers, including domestic workers, who were particularly vulnerable to trafficking. The government worked with NGOs to provide some assistance to survivors of human trafficking, including forced labor.

Also see the Department of State's *Trafficking in Persons Report* at <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>.

## **c. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age for Employment**

See the Department of Labor's *Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor* at <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/findings>.

## **d. Discrimination with Respect to Employment and Occupation**

The constitution states all citizens “are equal in rights, freedoms, and general duties without discrimination based on religion, belief, gender, origin, race, color, language, disability, social class, political or geographic affiliation, or any other reason.” It does not specify age, citizenship, sexual orientation, gender identity, or HIV-positive or other communicable disease status. The law does not specifically protect some categories of workers, including agricultural and domestic workers, and other sectors of the informal economy.

No law grants or prohibits refugees the right to work. Those seeking employment

were hampered by lack of jobs and societal discrimination, particularly against Sudanese and other sub-Saharan Africans. Refugees who found work took low-paying jobs in the informal market, such as domestic servants, and were vulnerable to exploitation by employers. Local rights groups observed that worsening economic conditions exacerbated these difficulties.

Labor laws provide for equal rates of pay for equal work for men and women in the public but not the private sector. Educated women had employment opportunities, but social pressure against women pursuing a career was strong. In 2021 the Ministry of Manpower issued new labor regulations that removed gender-based restrictions preventing women from working in the evenings and performing jobs related to manufacturing spirits, fireworks, fertilizers, pesticides, asphalt, painting metals, radioactive substances, and moving machinery. The new regulations require employers to provide women safe transportation and working conditions at night and grant women the right to perform any job function, except in fields with chemical, physical, biological, and engineering risks during pregnancy and lactation periods.

Large sectors of the economy controlled by the military excluded women from high-level positions.

While the law provides for persons with disabilities to gain access to vocational training and employment, the government did not effectively enforce prohibitions against such discrimination. Discrimination also occurred against women and migrant workers (see sections 2.d. and 6), and those previously detained or imprisoned on political charges, according to media and NGO reports.

An employee facing discrimination may file a report with the local labor office. If the employee and the employer are unable to reach an amicable settlement, they may file their claim in administrative court, which may order the employer to redress the complaint or to pay damages or legal fees. According to local rights groups, implementation of the law was inadequate. Additionally, the lengthy and expensive litigation process could deter employees from filing claims. In January 2021 the Ministry of Planning and Economic Development announced the creation of an Equal Opportunities Unit to prevent discrimination and promote gender equity and inclusiveness in the ministry. This unit and its counterparts in other

agencies under the ministry are responsible for gathering and analyzing data on gender and other forms of discrimination, which informed policy decisions and augmented training for employees, according to official statements.

Protests by state television workers employers' failure to pay workers their bonuses in recent years began in January and continued for several months. Tens of thousands of workers, including technicians, administrative workers, presenters, writers, editors, reporters, camera crews, and directors were employed by the Radio and Television Union, the state-run broadcaster in Egypt. More than three months after the start of the protests, the National Media Authority issued in March the first decision to terminate service contracts. Among those terminated was journalist Safaa al-Qorbaji, who had been encouraging workers to continue the protests by broadcasting video clips on social media, according to local media reports. According to the accounts of employees, the government began punishing protesters by referring them for investigations and blocking entrance to the headquarters in the Maspero building, where sit-ins were held. According to a worker representative, the investigations included 36 workers from different company sectors and were followed by wage deductions ranging from five to 15 days' pay. The National Media Authority also suspended eight other employees in areas outside of Cairo for taking actions in solidarity with the main demonstrations, according to a local rights group.

## **e. Acceptable Conditions of Work**

**Wage and Hour Laws:** The government sets a monthly minimum wage for government employees and public-sector workers, which is above the poverty line. The law stipulates a maximum 48-hour workweek for the public and private sectors and provides for premium pay for overtime and work on rest days and national holidays. The law prohibits excessive compulsory overtime. According to labor rights organizations, the government implemented the minimum wage for public-sector workers but applied it only to direct government employees and included benefits and bonuses in calculating total salaries. For government employees and public business-sector workers, the government also set a maximum wage limit per month. The government sets worker health and safety standards, for example, by prohibiting employers from maintaining hazardous working conditions. The law excludes agricultural, fisheries, and domestic

workers from regulations concerning wages, hours, and working conditions.

The law does not require equal pay for equal work. Penalties for violating laws on acceptable conditions of work were not commensurate with crimes such as fraud, which are punishable by imprisonment. In February the Ministry of Manpower set the penalty for facilities that do not apply the minimum wage at the same penalty level for nonpayment of wages as stipulated in the law. Employers can be fined EGP 100-500 (\$4-\$20), with the fine multiplied by the number of workers. The fine can be doubled in the case of recurrence.

**Occupational Safety and Health:** Occupational safety and health (OSH) standards were not always sufficient for the main industries, such as agriculture, manufacturing, and services.

**Wage, Hour, and OSH Enforcement:** The National Wages Council, headed by Minister of Planning and Economic Development, sets the minimum wage for private-sector workers. The Ministry of Manpower, which chairs the National Center for Occupational Safety and Health Studies and Securing the Work Environment, is responsible for enforcing labor laws and standards for working conditions. The government did not effectively enforce the law. Penalties for OSH violations, which were sometimes enforced with fines and imprisonment, were commensurate with other laws, such as negligence. Labor inspectors have the authority to make unannounced inspections and initiate sanctions. The number of labor inspectors, however, was insufficient to enforce compliance. By law workers may remove themselves from situations that endanger health or safety without jeopardy to employment, although authorities did not reliably enforce this right. Few details were available on workplace fatalities and accidents. Responsibility for identifying unsafe situations remains with occupational safety and health experts and the employer and not the worker.

The government provided services, such as free health care, to all citizens, but the quality of services was often poor. Other benefits, such as social insurance, were available only to employees in the formal sector. Some private-sector employers reportedly required workers to sign undated resignation letters as a condition of employment, which the employers could use to terminate employees at will.

In August the Ministry of Social Solidarity launched the “Your Road is Safe” initiative targeted at delivery workers, part of the government’s effort to expand the social safety network among irregular workers. The program was aimed at providing them with social insurance, health insurance, and credit, including through distribution of bicycles, motorcycles, and helmets, in addition to lectures on safe riding.

**Informal Sector:** The Ministry of Manpower did not apply labor standards to the informal sector, which employed approximately 40 percent of workers. Informal workers faced poor working conditions throughout the country. According to statements by a ministry official in December, approximately three million of the 10-11 million workers in the informal sector were operating with contracts or otherwise connected to an official process. Obstacles to improving working conditions in both the private sector and informal sector included uneven application or lack of regulations and restrictions on engaging in peaceful protests as a means of negotiating resolutions to workplace disparities. Domestic workers, agricultural workers, street vendors, workers in rock quarries, and workers in other parts of the informal sector were most likely to face hazardous or exploitative conditions. There were reports of employer abuse of citizens and undocumented foreign workers, particularly Sudanese and other sub-Saharan African domestic workers.